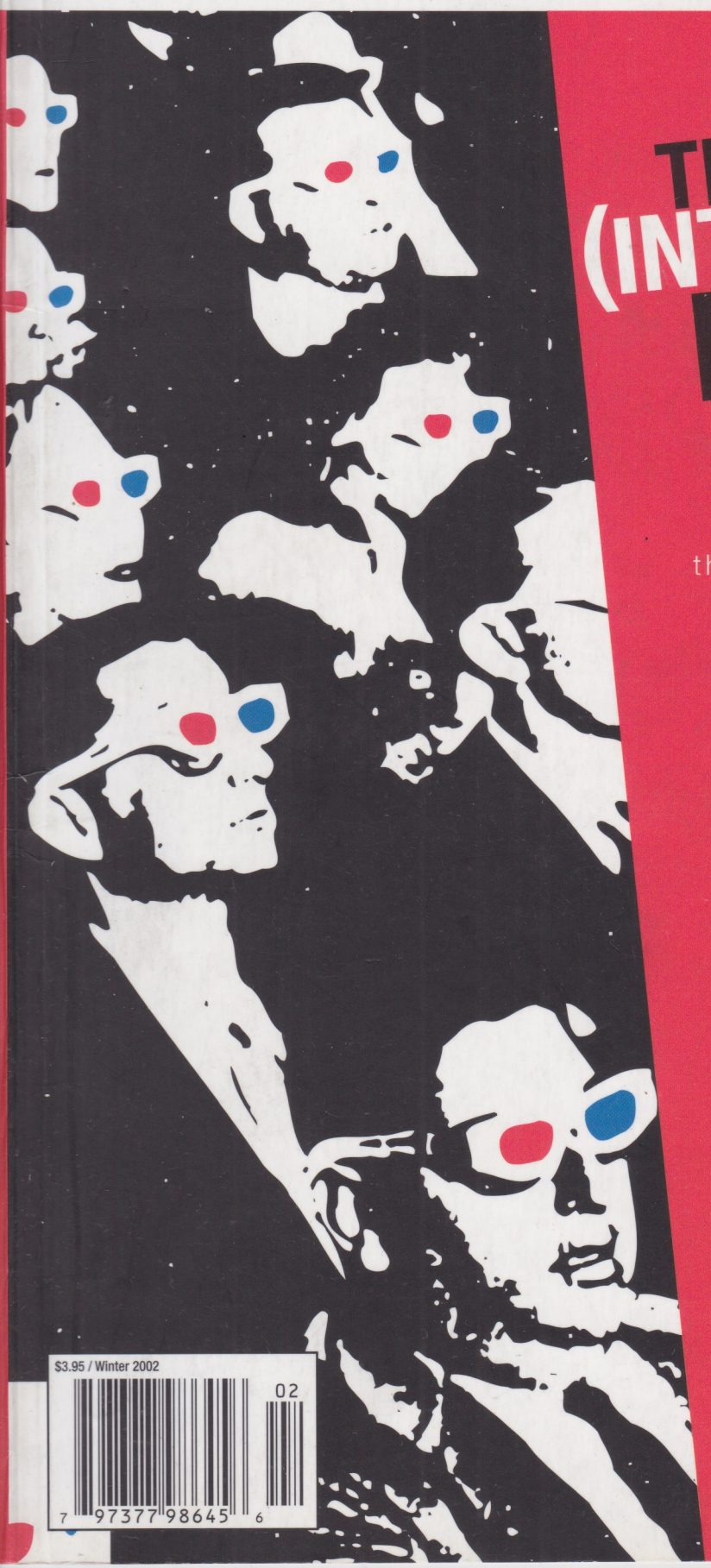
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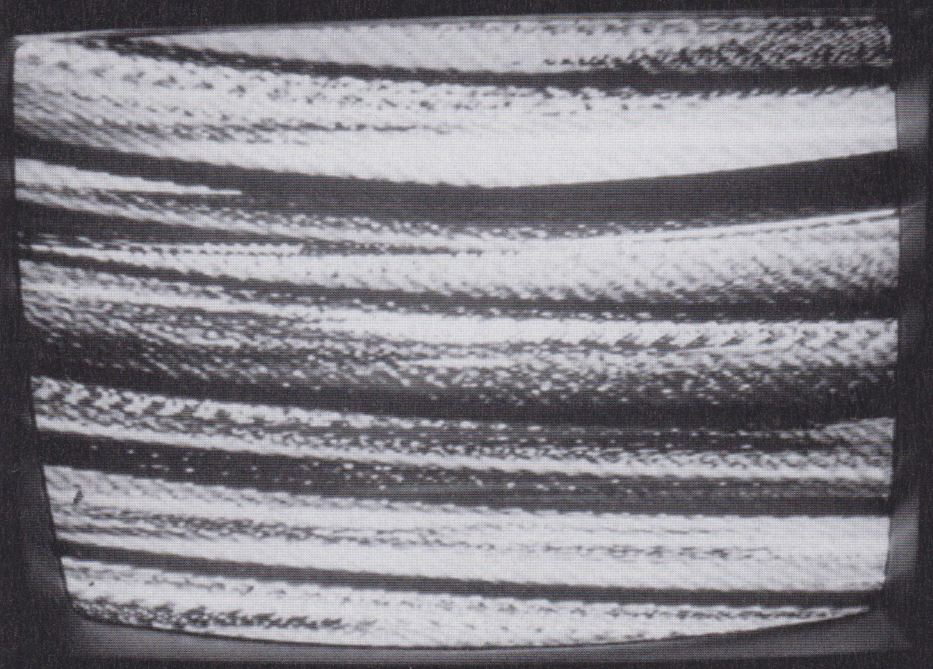
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Cursive	Unwound
Cutthroats 9	UK Subs
Electric Frankenstein	M. Gira
The Real McKenzies	Spirit Caravan
The Faint	The Clean
J. Robbins	Superchunk
Easy Action	Mike Scott
Mike Watt	Citizen Fish
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CORRECTIONS/NOTES

Last issue contained an interview with rock'n'roll writer heroes Gina Arnold and Denise Sullivan, but they did not write for Cream magazine, as suggested by my intro, though they always wanted to. Sorry. Peter Case, who was also interviewed last issue, has been nominated for a Grammy for his Mississippi John Hurt tribute album *Avalon Blues*. Peter Case is a god, so don't forget that.

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EDITOR'S INTRO.

In late November, I wrote this intro and now will stand by it.

It's been two months since I actually wrote a sentence. Not slanted blurry scribbles on postcards, or email short hand, but real sentences with meat and bones. This issue was completed under the long terrible shadow of Sept. 11th and a weird faraway thing called war, and there's no way I can deny this, or pretend that readers will somehow blank out when flipping through the magazine. We are not that ahistorical, nor are we amnesiacs.

I didn't want to even gamble on any sentences, didn't want to get it all wrong, or say something dumb and patriotic, or angry and blown up, or something knee-jerk and pathetic. But now seems the time, though my head is clouded over with cold medicine and lack of sleep. I'm sitting here listening to the songwriter Matthew Ryan, who seems to have come from nowhere and disappeared down the same route. My Life Sentence rock'n'roll T-shirt is worn and faded, but it fits me like I'm eighteen and skanking to "Punks for Profit" on the carpeted front space of the roller rink as the boys speed through ten songs in twelve minutes. But now I'm thirty, and my hair seems to be running away from my head, leaving only sallow skin and stubble. There are car bombs in Israel and U.S. Special Forces tumbling through caves that look like small apartments, all paid for by Reagan's not-so-covert war against the Soviets. Then there's my CD player and Matthew Ryan. Please sing Ryan, I need it really bad.

I want to tell you about my New York down by the Twin Towers, not that those two peaks of commerce and conquest meant so much to me, but people do, and watching the plane melt into the side of Tower Two was like watching a thuggish looking Polish kid with a broken arm getting slammed into the side of moving subway on 14th St. six years ago by a Puerto Rican teenager who was pissed that whitey called his sister a whore. My stomach felt crushed by a two ton truck as his head smacked against the metal subway car shell and popped with the sound of a baseball against a brick wall. Your bowels quiver. Your fingers look like convoluted wires. They are antsy, fidgety. But it happens so fast, the kids have already leapt over the ticket rail, that you just stare down at the concrete and wish that you weren't just a quivering piece of meat in the universe, but a hero. But you're not. So when the Twin Towers crushed down on themselves, it was worse, much worse. And even now you don't want to feel it, or you feel like you are coming apart inch by inch.

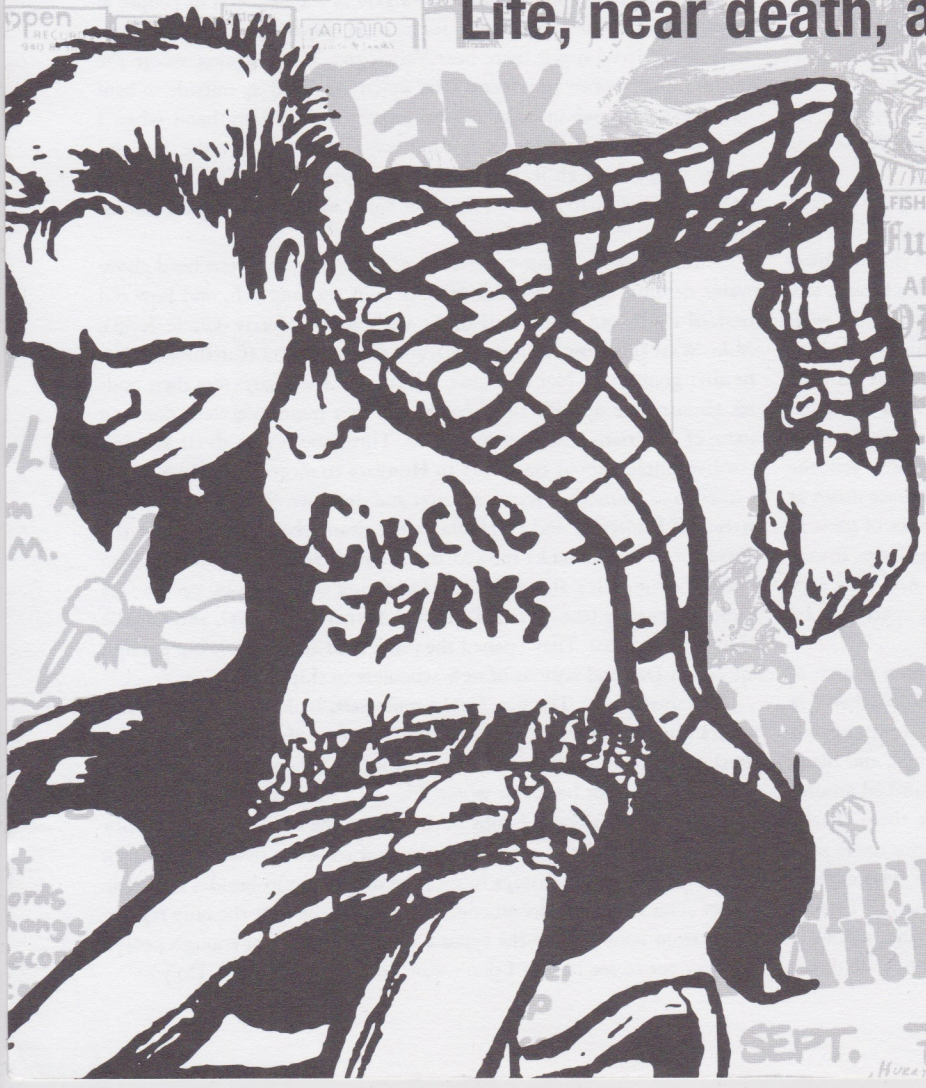
I worked blocks away from ground zero in TriBeCa, on a stretch of Varick St. that coughed up the river at the west end. My brother was helping paint enormous canvases with paint sticks up and down, up and down, minimalist wallpaper-like paintings with red, orange, and black lines that would end up in Bill Gates' home. I mostly climbed around scaffolding, rolled up these monster canvases and took them to the upper floor of the building owned by a French designer we never saw, or sparred Tae Kwon Do style with an out of work actor who eagerly pummeled my chest. Robert DiNero lived a few blocks away. I never saw him, but I passed his favorite Japanese restaurant and wished I could afford one fifty dollar dinner. My brother and I used to walk down to a small wedge of a park near Manhattan Community College and lay down and fall asleep to the sounds of kids yanking on each other and lunging at slides and seesaws. We shopped across from the Twin Towers at a discount designer shop where I bought Italian black vinyl pants for fifteen bucks, and I was so proud of them until a redhead told me they looked like they belonged with a tuxedo. A few weeks ago at a concert I split them down my ass as I drummed furiously. Back then, in 1997, I walked through the bottom of the Twin Towers, saw the stage where Emmylou Harris played for free and Allen Ginsberg chanted about skeletons. There was a City College Annex on Varick where I heard the author Barbara Solomon, friend of the painter Larry Rivers. Her own mom was a terrific, but little noted collage artist and painter during the 1930s whose pieces lined the walls of the Solomon family apartment in the Upper East Side where I stole pieces of bread and honey, drank wine, and tried to convince people I could tell a good story if only they could get used to stories about drunken swingers in the Midwest or people in New Mexico who sold plasma for tuition payments. The poet Ann Lauterbach lived down there near Varick too, in a building where the bottom floor was an egg depot. Beat up trucks lined up outside to haul eggs everyday, and upstairs her cat nearly took off my hand when I taunted its belly. That's the neighborhood I knew. So when the dust and debris swept through it, it swept through a part of my life. When the police cordoned part of it off, they put barricades around my memories. But, back to this issue.

Number two is about perseverance, about keeping your head above water damnit, about the proximity of pain and anguish, and how old bastard death can wrestle all night with Keith Morris (Circle Jerks), Mike Watt (Firehose, Minutemen), and Chris Spencer (Cutthroats), but he ain't gonna win. Not this time. All three of these guys saw their bodies almost give up, one to diabetes, one to a huge infection, one to a gang of Austrians with shit for brains. This issue is also about keeping our lives intact, about travelling to Hungary to meet friends like Balazs Sarkadi and Nemeth Marcell, a writer and designer. When you walk the streets of Budapest, and think about the dead rebels buried under the streets after Soviet tanks mowed them down, you don't come back to Texas the same. It's also about not forgetting our mentors, people like Captain Sensible (the Damned), Randy Turner (Big Boys), and Charlie Harper (UK Subs). They opened the punk road and made it big enough for Green Day and legions of new schoolers to skip down.

It's January now. The war, for the most part, is already finished. They are trading Indian movie star cards in the streets of Kabul, while in the north women are pushing their way back into school. It was a low key Christmas, and for better or worse, like a 1950s crisp black and white flashback, firefighters and cops have become the new icons of America all over again, and the economy looks as if someone deflated it with a pitchfork. But there's always music, the only vitamin besides love that I trust. This magazine documents that fact. By the way, the only regrets I have from issue one are the typos and the fact that not enough people like you got to see it. But I don't want to live with regrets. Do you?

Circle Jerks

When the shit really hits the fan: Life, near death, and the Circle Jerks



Some guys like Keith Morris are a reservoir for Murphy's law. Everything that can go wrong does go wrong. His body has been bent and broken, but his will is like reinforced concrete. Having recently survived a disturbing bout with diabetes that left him on the barbed wire of delusion and death, he avoids singing "Live Fast and Die Young" now, but crowds still undergo near convulsions when the Circle Jerks whip out smoldering classics with the help of resilient and limber-wristed touring drummer Kevin from Geraldine Fibbers.

Zander Schloss/**Bass Player**
Kevin Fitzgerald/**Drums**
Keith Morris/**Singer**



Taken from Rat Music for Rat People, Vol. 1

You guys were originally supposed to be on the 2001 Warped tour?
Keith: Our choice to get back together and make this noise we create is due to the fact, yes, that we were offered dates on the Warped tour. The problem that ensued was that the negotiations fell through. The people on the Warped tour weren't willing to pay us any kind of money, and our booking agent said why don't you wait until the Warped tour is over and go and do your own tour and pay some bills. Take care of some business. It's all been downhill from there. The bill collectors will not leave us alone.

If there is a second leg to the tour this year, will it happen because you want to play music, or pay some bills?
Keith: Both. We have a group of promoters that we owe shows to. We cancelled a tour about six years ago.

And you still owe them shows?
Keith: Well, we feel we owe them shows. 90 percent of the shows were sold out, the other 10 percent were 90 percent sold out. So we feel that we need to go back and fulfill our commitment.

Is the Circle Jerks cover record, which is a benefit to help you pay doctor's bills, going to be released any time soon?
Keith: I imagine it will take at least another 3-6 months because we're still waiting on the Beastie Boys, Pearl Jam, the Foo Fighters, Nina Hagen, and Butthole Surfers.

You wanted a diverse number of artists, not just punk bands covering the Circle Jerks.
Keith: Well, how boring is that? I've talked to Los Lobos, hopefully they'll do a song in espanol. We were going to have Mojo Nixon play on there, but he felt that the song we chose for him he couldn't do it justice, so I believe we are going to end up using a guy named Ryan Adams.

From Whiskeytown.
Keith: Right.
Zander: Hey, I thought it was Bryan Adams *(laughs)*. We're taking him off the oxygen tank to do the record.

All I know is that a band that's been around twenty years that can still pull teenage kids, that's pretty rare.

Well, you've described the Circle Jerks tour van as an oxygen tank on wheels.
Keith: Lacking oxygen on wheels.

Does touring have the same meaning for you as it did 6, or even 20 years ago?
Keith: Well, we're certainly working our asses off. One of the really great things is that we realize every night we're pulling a lot of people and that's a really great sign. We had a few shows where the attendance was kind of iffy, but all the other shows have been great. Last night was one of the largest crowds we've played to in Austin ever. I think the most we've ever pulled in Austin is 800-900 people, and I think we had about 800 people last night.
Kevin: All I know is that a band that's been around twenty years that can still pull teenage kids, that's pretty rare.
Zander: We owe it to the fans *(laughs)*.
Kevin: I think it just says something about the fact, well, not that the Circle Jerks were ahead of their time, but I think it's a rare thing that is really cool that we have a situation where we're not a nostalgia act really. There are new fans.
Zander: We're still vital. And vibrant.
Keith: And Viagrant.
Zander: And Geritolic.
Keith: And vagrant. There were a couple of times last night on stage that it was so hot that I didn't even know where I was at.

You played the outdoor stage at Emo's?

Keith: Yeah. It was about 100 degrees out.

But why tour with a street punk band like the U.S. Bombs, when you could organize a tour as diverse as the cover record you're planning?

Keith: That's a great point, because Kevin brought up a couple of bands that were on Kill Rock Stars or the K label, and I was thinking of... Well, I think it was Bratmobile.

Kevin: Or the Explosion.

Keith: Well, the Explosion are basically a punk band.

Kevin: Bratmobile would have been awesome. I love that record.

Keith: Our problem was that we felt that our fans that were going to come and see us wouldn't appreciate those bands, and we didn't want to put any added pressure on any bands that came along with us.

Around the time you were diagnosed with diabetes, there was a period of two years when you really didn't listen to rock music.

Keith: I still listened to music. I just had a really difficult time concentrating on anything. I had no frame of mind. I had no sense. My struggle was just to stay alive.

Zander: I saw Keith three nights before his appendix exploded, and I thought, this is the last time I'm ever going to see him.

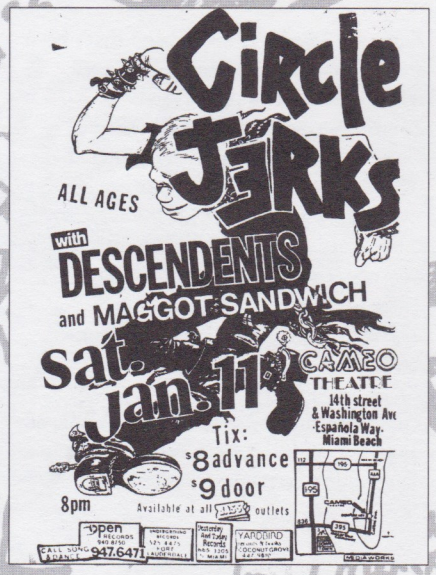
Kevin: He got down to 85 pounds.

Zander: He had this look glazed in his eye. It was scary, and I've seen it before.

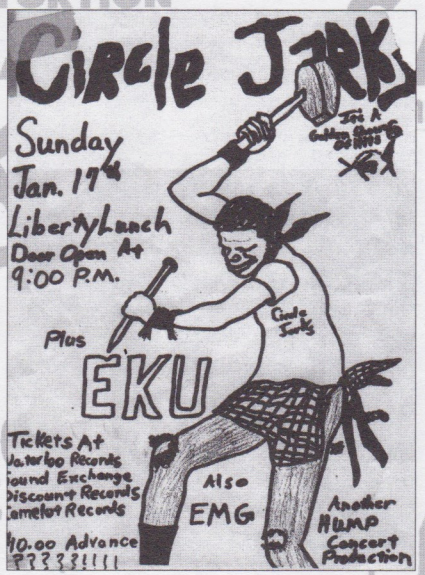
I know now that you have a better diet, and have been bicycling, but while you were sick, were you able to do anything, like oil painting, which you've done in the past?

Keith: No, I couldn't even watch TV. I was trying to read, but I couldn't concentrate. I'd try and watch TV, but I'd fall asleep, come in and out of consciousness.









I saw Keith three nights before his appendix exploded, and I thought, this is the last time I'm ever going to see him.



© Murray Bowles

After you ate, you would sleep for four hours at a time?

Keith: 45 minutes at a time. If over the course of the night I could piece together an hour, I was doing great. There are a couple of pills they can give you to regulate insulin, so they had me on that, and I was losing weight as I was taking it. I would eat dinner, I would be done with dinner about 7:00, or 7:30, and I would be up all night. I'd be in the bathroom all night. Everything I had eaten all day would just fall right out of me. It was like a trapdoor. It fell right out. The doctor said he couldn't keep me on this medication if I was not gaining weight. It's important that you gain weight, because I was down to 80-85 pounds.

Did it surprise you how many bands, including Pennywise, X, and Gibby from the Butthole Surfers, came forward and played benefit shows for your bills?

Keith: If you look at the roster of bands, they're all great bands: Fishbone, Perfect Circle, Vandals, Pennywise, Thelonius Monster, the Weirdoes.

It was the first show the Weirdos had played in years.

Keith: They only played four or five songs, but they were amazing. Zander played with them.

You played with the Weirdos?

Zander: I sure did. I played with the Weirdos from 1987-89, or something like that.

Was that at the same time when you were playing with Joe Strummer, or right after?

Zander: Right after. So it was more like '88, or '89.

Did Strummer ever approach you about playing with the Mescaleros?

Zander: One time I cornered Joe Strummer. It was a couple of years after we stopped touring together and playing. I said, are we ever going to work together again?

Keith: And Joe said, No!

Zander: Joe said (in Zander's best English accent), don't be stupid man *(laughs)*. I don't know if that meant, don't be stupid, what are you saying, or don't be stupid, of course we are. We shan't work together again.

What was it like not only playing with the Weirdoes again, but also for Keith?

Zander: It was wonderful.

Keith: They were great. I mean they were awesome. All the bands were stellar. I could not believe it. I was just in awe. By the end of the night I was in tears. It was amazing.

Zander: It felt incredible to be a part of that.

Keith: I really, seriously appreciate the fact that all the bands played.

You once said that you were fortunate to have been raised in the 1960s. Why do think that's fortunate?

Keith: Because the '60s were great. Listen to all the music that came out of the 1960s. All these punk rock, anarchy, destroy the system, we hate everything people, kill the hippies types weren't there to experience it. The peace and love movement. C'mon, look at what we have now. It's all hatred. I hate this. I want to kill you. I hate the government. But back then there was less crime, less violence. Everybody got along easier, better.

Zander: Except for that unmentionable war.

Or the race riots. You were playing in a garage once, and there was a hole in the wall, and you peeked through and saw the Doors practicing.

Keith: It was the Doors playing "Light my Fire" and "Break on Through to the Other Side."

Did you talk with them?

Keith: We were in awe.

Kevin: That's awesome. I've heard a lot of stories, but never that one.

Keith: As kids we're playing in the garage

doing what kids do. We heard this loud music coming from the garage next door. And one of the kids I was playing with got down on his hands and his knees and stuck his head through the hole in the wall. And he popped back over and we said, what's going on over there? He said, there's a band over there, they got a keyboard player and he's wearing glasses.

It sounded familiar.

Keith: So I said, let me take a look. The band was still playing. I popped my head through the wall, popped my head back, and looked at the guys I was playing with and said, that's the Doors. I saw them on Ed Sullivan. That's the Doors. There was no mistaking "Light my Fire," because in Los Angeles the year that it came out it was the number one song out of the top 100 hits. We always sat around listening to radio stations, because the radio stations back then were great.

When AM radio actually played rock'n'roll.

Kevin: They would play the Seeds.
Keith: The Standells.

Chocolate Watch Band. Did you get a chance to see the Beatles or the Rolling Stones, some of your other favorites?

Keith: Saw the Beatles on Ed Sullivan. That pissed my dad off.
Kevin: Did you get a Beatle hair cut?
Keith: No. I wasn't allowed to wear long hair.

Was your dad a military man?

Keith: Almost. No. He worked in a metal smithing shop and during the Korean War he had lead poisoning, so they won't let you go anywhere or do any fighting if you got some kind of health problems. And he was a heroin addict.

A family man heroin addict?

Keith: Yep.

When did you start playing music?

Keith: I never played music.

When did you start singing?

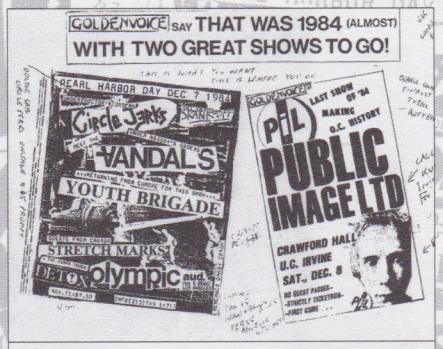
Zander: He plays music with his mouth; you can definitely hear riffs coming out of there.

Were you singing along to Black Oak Arkansas and Alice Cooper records?

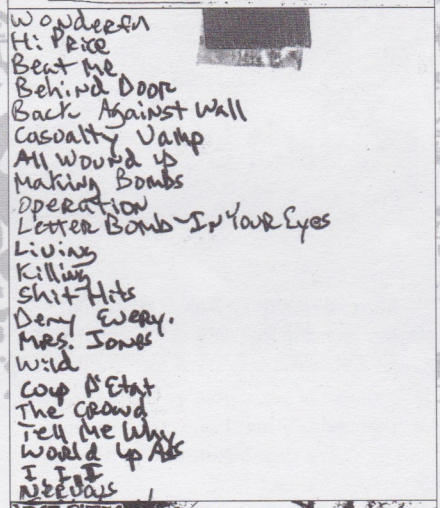
Keith: Oh yeah. Steppenwolf.

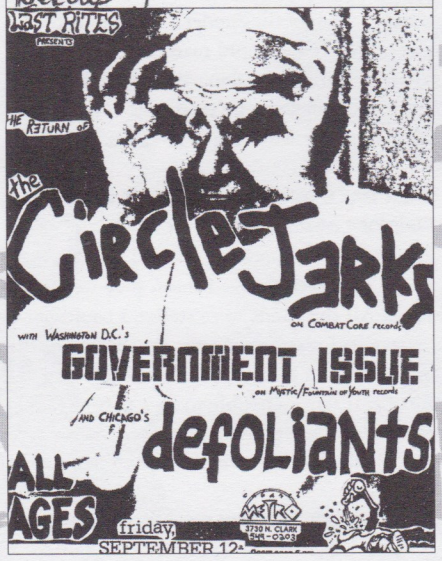
You once said, if there's anybody I could ever tour with, it would be Steppenwolf, Jon Spencer, and Captain Beefheart. So back in the '60s and '70s, what did Steppenwolf and Captain Beefheart mean to you?

Keith: Well, there was freedom. I believe that. Steppenwolf, with "Born to be Wild," you know, get out on the open highway. That has to represent freedom.









Then Beefheart represented a different kind of freedom?

Keith: Totally. Off the wall, wacky kind of freedom. Like you can do whatever you want. You want to play music, play whatever you want.

You worked at a ma and pa record shop during the 1970s?

Keith: I worked at a couple of different record stores. I worked at the Record Hole, Rubicon...

Did it make you a bigger music fan?

Keith: I've always loved music from the first time I heard Blue Cheer's version of "Summertime Blues."

So when you cover Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Fortunate Son" on your record *VI* it made perfect sense, because those are your roots. But was it lost on the punk kids?

Keith: Well, we're basically just a protest folk band amplified, and "Fortunate Son" is a protest song.

In the mid-'70s did you feel something was going to happen, that bands like the Dils, the Bags, and the Weirdos were about to happen, and the era of Alice Cooper was almost over?

Keith: I didn't know really. I didn't pay any attention to anything like that. I just loved music however it came.
Kevin: Didn't you know it in Black Flag?
Keith: No, we didn't. In Black Flag we didn't know anything. It was just set it up and let it rip.

But as you played songs like "Wasted," didn't you know it was something totally different from not only Peter Frampton, but the MC5 as well?

Keith: We weren't thinking in terms like that. Our thing was just to play, make some noise. Let's just have some fun. There was no premeditated, mapped out route where we were going to take it.

Have all the Black Flag songs with you singing on them been released, because on the old set lists there are songs that haven't shown up anywhere.

Keith: (pauses for a minute) Yeah, I'm pretty sure that has happened. I'm sure it's all available somewhere. I've actually heard that Thurston Moore from Sonic Youth has a video copy of one of the first shows, at a place called Pollywog Park.
Kevin: I've heard stories about this show.
Keith: It was an early afternoon Sunday. A picnic in the park with the pond and the ducks. About six dozen picnicking families, and 300 punk rockers. And the whole place just exploded. There was food flying from all directions. You see, we were out of the '60s.

Do feel that kind of spontaneity is lost. Would any of the Epitaph bands do that?

Keith: I don't really know, and it's almost as if I don't really care. There's so many of those bands out there, it's hard to keep up with all of them.

Zander, *Repo Man* has been re-released in an enhanced sound, wide-screen version. What was filming that like?

Zander: I had just turned 21 the night before the scene in the grocery store, so I was just a kid.

How old was Emilio Estevez at the time?

Zander: A little younger than me, I'd say like 20, 19. It was kind of a strange thing. I was kind of living with Alex Cox (Sid and Nancy, Repo Man) off and on, living in my car, living with Alex in the *Repo Man* office. And Alex hired me as a PA for the film, a production assistant, so I was running around cleaning up cigarette butts. Doing all sorts of trash pick up. Anyway, I was hired to play the part of Kevin on the very same day the producers came to me and said that Chris Penn's agents had negotiated for him to play the role, and they let me go. I basically told them, you guys don't know what you're doing, I am Kevin *(laughs)*! I came back the next day with, well, it wasn't a real mohawk, it was like my hair was short on the side and the middle long, what I call a pose-hawk. So I basically just got into the character from that day on and tried to prove to them how wrong they were.

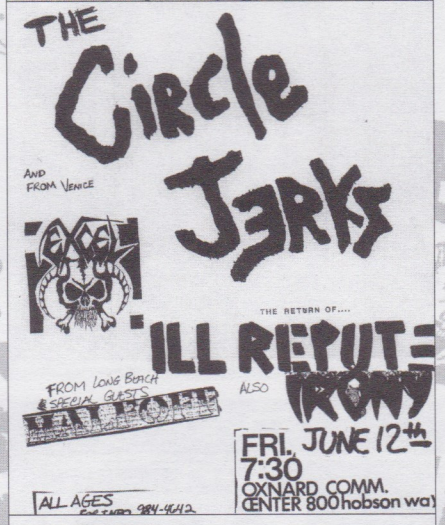
Keith: And he's still in character!

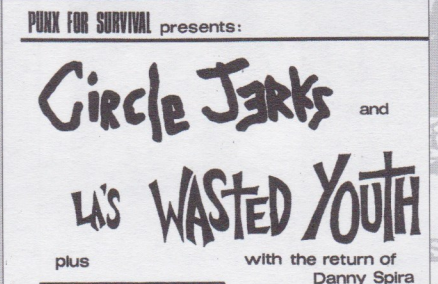
Zander: Finally Michael Nesmith saw the rushes and thought that Chris Penn's performance was just horrible, and Alex said I was the only other one to contend for the role. Michael gave me the nod. So I went from cleaning up cigarette butts to having my own trailer with a star on it. I met the Circle Jerks guys on the set, and said, "Hi, I'm Kevin in *Repo Man*." *(laughs)* And they kind of just walked by all grumpy. They were grumpy back then.

Keith: You don't understand. When you met us, we were hanging out in one of those aluminum trailers without any air-conditioning in the middle of the summer in full tuxedos. You'd be a grouch and a prick-ass bastard too.

Zander: You didn't have a star over your trailer like me.







That was at the same time that Chuck Biscuits (DOA, Black Flag) played with you?

Keith: Yeah, the ironic part is the song we recorded for *Repo Man* was the only song we ever recorded with Earl Liberty and Chuck Biscuits, and Chuck didn't even play drums on it. It was a drum track.

You went on to be in Cox's next pictures, like *Straight to Hell* and *Walker* even.

Zander: Yes, and I did the soundtrack for Walker with Joe Strummer.

But where *Sid and Nancy* and *Repo Man* were tight and cohesive, *Straight to Hell* was just one long party in Spain that you filmed.

Zander: It was one hell of a party!

What was he thinking?

Zander: I think what Alex was thinking was that we'd have a big party in preparation for going down to Nicaragua to film *Walker*. He's always had a kind of "fuck the studios" kind of mentality, and he's always been a shoot himself in the foot kind of director, which I love about him. I'm totally proud of the work I've done with Alex. I'm not going to say every film is a gem, but I think they all have something about them that makes sense when thinking about what he was doing. He was trying to spend the studio's money and have a great party for his friends. I'd probably do that if I were a director.

You met Elvis Costello, Dennis Hopper...

Zander: I jumped from the Circle Jerks to Joe Strummer and was doing a lot of jamming with Elvis Costello on the set. Joe was kind of lurking around and watching me, and playing with the Pogues. Then we met up again in Nicaragua and we were down there for three months, so I had plenty of time to jam with Joe. We had some really great jams with this band down there. A couple of the other actors were musicians. At any rate, I met Dennis Hopper, Grace Jones, and Courtney Love. I told Courtney Love that I wouldn't give her guitar lessons because she would never do anything *(laughs)*.

A big mistake?

Zander: It's not so much a mistake. It was just the way I felt at the time. She was annoying.



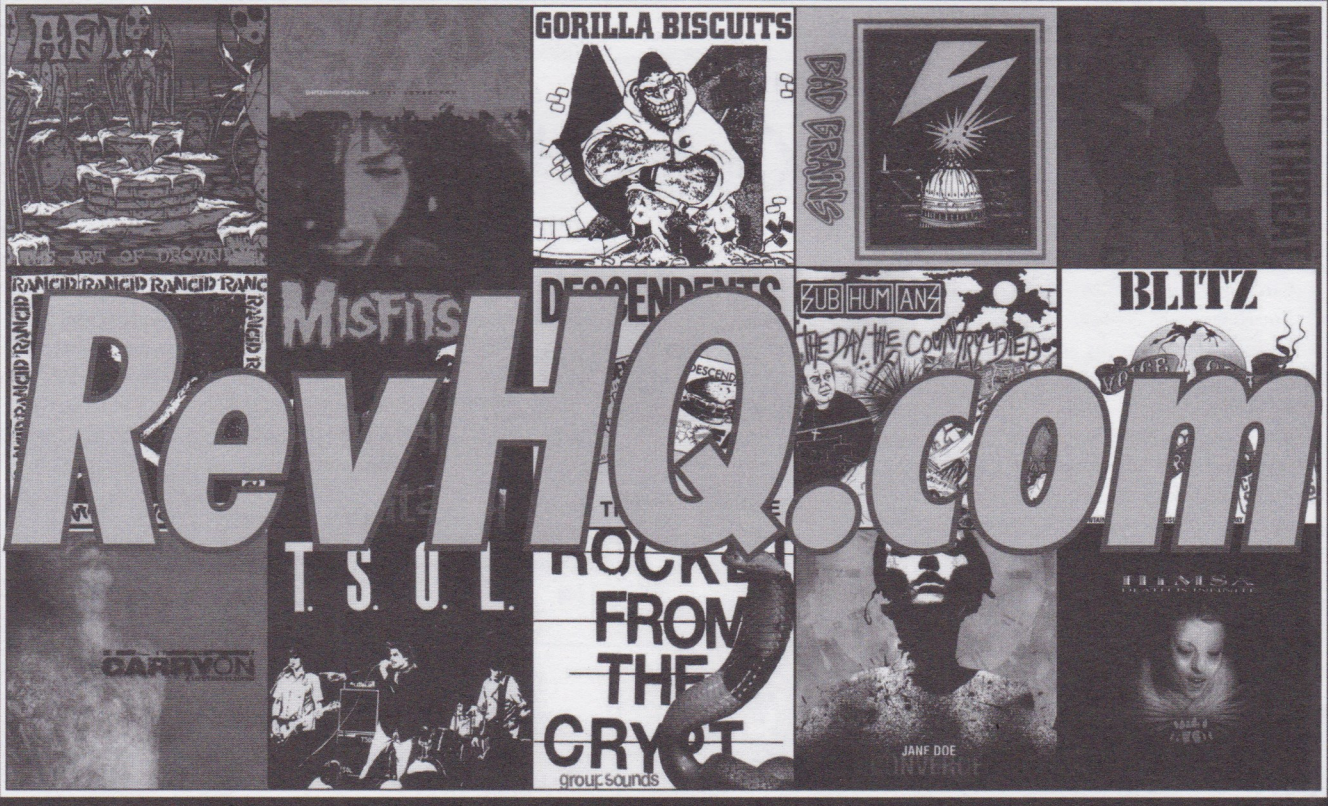
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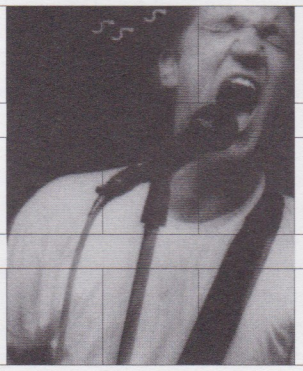


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cursive



I feel that I'm only a little bit art rock right now,
and I wish I was a lot of it.
I think that's a pretension in itself.

In your opinion, what's worse, pretentiousness, or self-consciousness?
Self-consciousness is terrible I think. Or I should say self-consciousness in the negative sense. I mean I don't know, has anyone ever used the Kant system? I'm sure for the way you're asking it, that people who are too self-conscious can't perform what they really want to, what they really think is important to them, or a good demonstration of what they considered to be art.

Why has the idea of being a rock'n'roll artist been debased?
It's been a commodity since it first popped out, since it came on the scene in the 1940s and 1950s, you know? And it's debased because unfortunately, or maybe it's great, anyone can write a song, though not a lot can succeed at it, but a lot can. For me, I don't feel that I am a lazy man artist, even if I want to call myself that, I like story writing too a lot, and I do that as well, but I don't do it nearly as often. And songs are these silly little tidbits. It's for like a three minute attention span live. Yeah, I feel being a rock'n'roll artist is debased. I don't know if it ever wasn't the case...I dunno. It all depends on the band, but it's the industry that debases it too.

Didn't Patti Smith say in the 1970s that rock'n'roll would be art?
Did she? I don't know.

How did the addition of a cello player make you re-imagine the tone or structure of Cursive?
It's helped me recognize how much melody there is, or that there could have been in the music that we've already done, and how much more melody we could put in the structure now. And also how much more mood enhancement it can give. There are a lot of benefits to it.

Why are you a bit hesitant to use the term singer-songwriter to describe the soft rock aspect of the Good Life?
Well, I don't mind being called singer-songwriter; it's only that I'm trying to give the band I'm playing with respect. I don't really want to call it Tim Kasher and the Good Life. But it is singer-songwriter music. It's not really a big deal; it's just a side project that I'm really trying to shy away from.

What are your limitations with Cursive, and what are your limitations with the Good Life?
With Cursive, I think the limitations are pretty large. Up until now I've always had the problem with trying to keep the music themed, not just one certain theme, and then another theme, but that hard rock sound. It's such a pigeonholing sound and I'm trying to get out of it. That's why we get a cello and figure out other ways of doing it. It's just that ultimately, of all those certain song styles out there, it seems that there's only those certain styles that can actually be considered Cursive songs. It seems like with albums, people buy them looking for something kind of specific, and I guess that kind of bothers me. Not that the band bothers me, that's why I like doing other types of stuff as well. With the Good Life, on one hand one of the limitations is that we feel it shouldn't get too hard because I don't want people to equate it with Cursive. The Good Life is trying to regain, or trying to stay with, as much freedom as possible as far as...

The outlook?
Or like that Elvis Costello type of any style goes. It's just singer-songwriter, as you were saying. It doesn't have to have a sound, it doesn't have to be like, keep those guitar parts like that... But it's not like Cursive is like that, believe me.

Do those limitations demand new forms of inspiring the imaginations of band members, or make you want to channel energies into even more bands?
With Cursive, that's why I got the cello. I need to re-invent this in some way so I don't have to channel my energies into another band. I feel that I enjoy Cursive, and I want to keep believing in it and enjoying it. I get kind of tired sometimes on the road with both bands, because you want to have new things night to night, you want to be playing new music. But I guess that's touring and promotion. I don't know, with every Cursive album I do it gets harder and harder to write the songs, try and stay in the genre, and write something new for it. I'm sure there's plenty of criticism out there that I don't do that, and I'm sure there's people who are generous with the way they feel about it. I'm still relatively young, and it's the first time I've had to present a fourth LP, not to mention EPs and 7" all in the catalog. It's difficult you know.

Intimidating?
I thought the third was really scary. So with this one I just felt we had to be a different band, but we're still trying to figure out how to keep those aspects of Cursive in it, without losing the idea of why people would still be interested in buying it.

Did you feel the broken relationship that shaped *Domestica* molded an image of the band in the minds of listeners that would be hard to shake?

Self-consciousness is terrible I think.
Or I should say self-consciousness in the negative sense.

I'm hoping, and kind of assuming, that because that was such a conceptualized album, it was a kind of tidy package of an album, I don't think that people expect another album to come out about a relationship. If anything, I think people might be expecting a theme on a different subject, because I like for albums to be cohesive like that. It is kind of what we're working on now, what Ted and I are mulling over... We certainly have no interest in writing in that way again, but we will lose fans because of that. But you know, that's ridiculous. I'm sorry, if it's not emotionally drenched with sorrow they'll be turned off, but you know, you've got to grow with it.

Like the band Cave-In, who totally switched, and lost fans, but gained many new ones. It's worth the risk, especially

since doing the same record again and again will kill you after awhile.

As a songwriter, it's hugely important to me that I can show to anyone who is paying attention to what I write that I'm versatile, that's why I like to do two bands. They're keeping me busy, and I want to be able to release multiple albums that show me and everyone else that there are themes, styles, and multiple concepts that I can deal with, I guess.

Do you feel *Burst* and *Bloom* pursued a new concept?

Burst and *Bloom* was anti-concept. It was really kind of like, *Domestica* happened, and everyone took to it so well, and we appreciate that, but we're still Cursive. We're not the *Domestica* band, we're Cursive. If anything, we wanted the EP to be an example of different directions that we would be willing to go to, or even different directions that we might go to with the new album.

If you really felt that the Faint went electronic because it was redundant for them to play aggressive rock music (like Cursive) in Omaha, then are you partially to blame for their success?

Actually, I did an interview earlier today and I was saying that, well I didn't use the word blame, that's a kind of funny way of putting it, but that all the Omaha songwriters and musicians are to blame for everyone's success. We also strive so hard to do something more unique and innovative than the last album was. Everyone is upping the ante.

There's that much inter-relationship?

Yeah, everyone is really close and it's never competitive, it's like awesome. But at the same time, we work very much on a local and friendship level. I believe that I can speak for all the songwriters that we are writing for each other first and foremost. I mean, we can go into a city and be really excited that's there are so many fans and such a great turn out, that's great, but my friends are first and foremost. I always want to know what Todd (the Faint) thinks of the new Cursive record, or how Connor (Bright Eyes) sees the latest Good Life. Just all of them.

You once said, I don't like to see bands recreate an album on stage, but Cursive did play *Domestica* at least once in its entirety, as Lou Reed has done with his albums. Are you trying to suggest that live shows should be more than just commercials for an album?

Well, if I said that at one point I think what I meant was I always remember when I saw Toad the Wet Sprocket years and years ago, and I was a fan at the time of *Pale*, their pre-big album, like I'm trying to get some integrity here or a cool point (*laughs*). But when I saw them live, they were so perfect at it that I was like there's no human error in this, I could have just wore the headphones and listened to the album really loud. When they do it so well, they don't put any character into it. I'm sure that people complain that I put too much character into it when I play live, I just try and change the sound around in terms of vocals. But on another note, I think its really important to have that one really special show when you play the album you just recorded, maybe your CD release in your hometown, and you play it front to back. End to end, I think that's awesome. And I really think that all bands should do that once if it's not an album full of singles that are tracked independent of each other. It should be cohesive, and there should be a reason why they are compiled together in that way. I think it's great to present it live at least once.

Like catharsis, getting it out of your system?

Ultimately, I'd like to write an album that is so thematic that when we go out on tour it would be called Cursive, followed by the name of the record. And every night, only play the album end to end. I think it would be cool, though I don't know if it would be received very well.

Does the first song on *Burst* and *Bloom* burst the bubble of indie marketing, or are you just suggesting that Saddle Creek sells you like a Sony sells one of their artists?

I was really just bursting a bubble on myself. They were very personal lyrics as far as I over-reacted and got a little too excited about how *Domestica* was received. It was the first album after we got back together and it was like, holy shit, we were planning on working a lot harder than we had to. It was the most successful thing we had done to date, let's put it that way. I over-reacted a bit, though it's like we sat around an oval table going, okay, what do we do next? We'll have to put out an EP, we can buy time. I just got sickened by it, and obviously I still wanted to do an EP, but I changed my mind about why I wanted to do it. Instead of being a marketing scheme, I tried to absolve myself of it, and I think I absolved myself through those lyrics. Like, this was the original intent, but fuck that. These are just more songs.

As a songwriter, it's hugely important to me that I can show to anyone who is paying attention to what I write that I'm versatile...

Ultimately, I'd like to write an album that is so thematic that when we go out on tour it would be called Cursive, followed by the name of the record. And every night, only play the album end to end. I think it would be cool, though I don't know if it would be received very well.

It's not an EP, not a buffer between albums, just a shorter Cursive album.
If anything, I might not have done it, but the wheel was already in motion, and we were like, yeah, we want to do it. And we never got to do an EP, and I think they are cool.

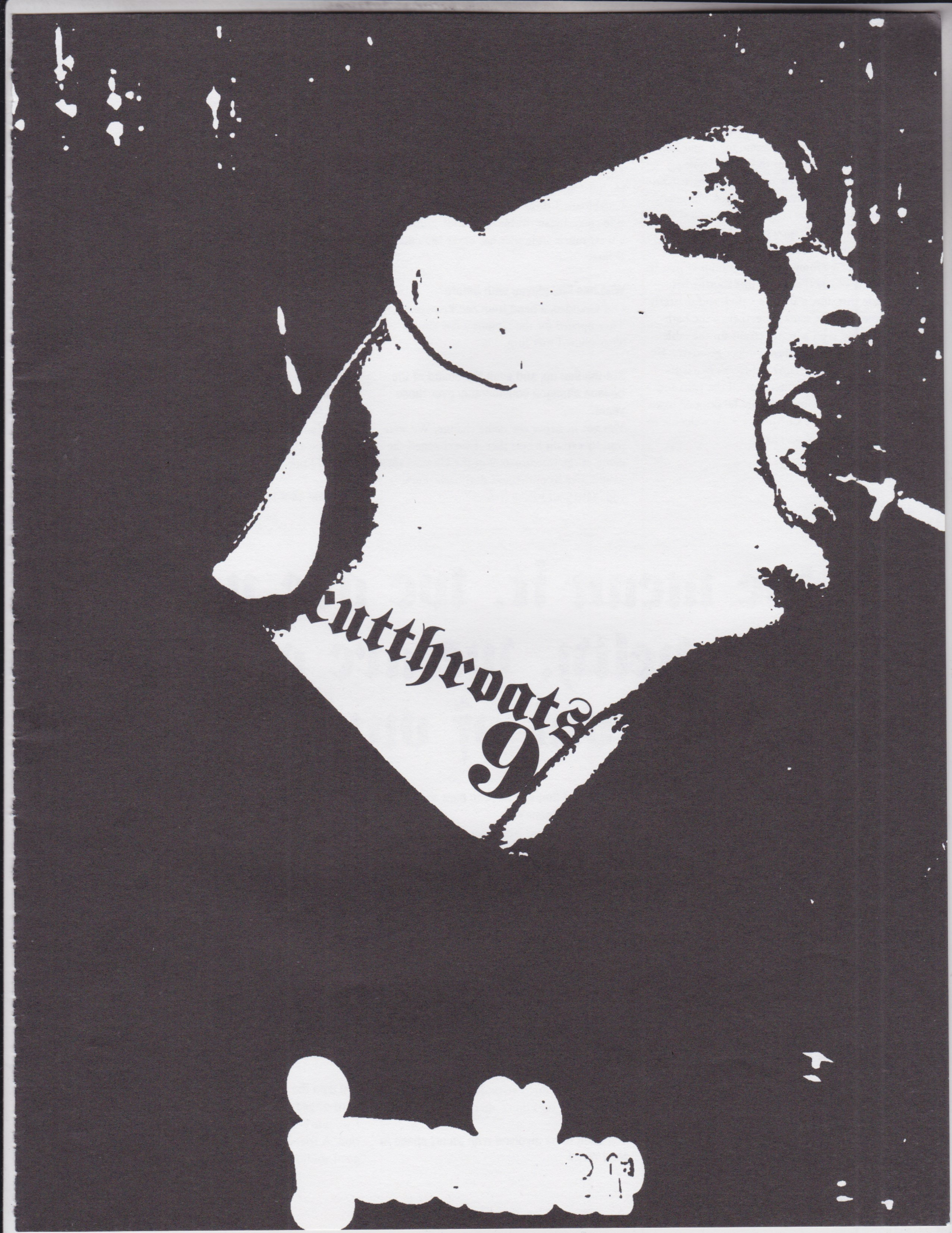
In the end, do your songs outmaneuver and outlive any attempt to package and sell them?
Ultimately, if I am understanding the question right, I don't think they can. I mean, just to be honest about it, which I think more people should be. What I wanted to get across with "Sink to the Beat" was that honest, ugly humility. By virtue of what I am doing right now, like talking to a recorder and releasing things on disc and distributed as globally as possible, and going town to town, trying to get out as many people as we can, with street-teamers, it does come down to it, yeah, I just want to write and play songs, but I am still living in that idealistic dream that maybe I can work my day job less than I am now. There's always been those different camps of art, or just art in general, in every field. I am happy with the way I do it, I don't think there's more integrity in the kid who just lays around drinking wine all day writing those incredible songs but won't do anything about it. By virtue of distributing and playing, then you are marketing. The songs don't outlive that, but at least they try. And you try to deal with the least amount of gloss and slickness as possible, and try to present it in the most honest way that you can. So people feel comfortable with it, and you still enjoy it, and you don't have to be miserable in your bedroom playing songs to yourself and some girl you are trying to attract or something, because in that case you are marketing yourself on a different level.

One member of Cursive once mentioned playing live with Bruce Springsteen, would you play with him if given the chance?
Yeah, I think so. I can say that even though Bruce, especially in the 1980s, became part of a very marketed campaign, I still like him. I like *Nebraska*; I like Bruce from the 1970s. I have such respect for him that sometimes its hard to maintain. I saw his HBO special about a year ago, and I kept watching it, but like the camera angles, and how slick it was presented bothered me... But ultimately, it was Bruce Springsteen, and he's a good guy. He's a songwriter. There are many more guys I feel uncomfortable about playing with or being presented with I suppose. If it was Bruce Hornsby, I think I might have a problem (*laughs*). Or Steve Winwood.





Courtesy of Saddle Creek


Cutthroats
9

As sheets of gray penetrating rain slammed all around the van parked next to Rudyards, a bar in Houston, my friend Bianca and I huddled next to the barely working heat vents and threw some questions at Chris Spencer. He's a savvy pool player, but good-natured about the fact, and even let a German exile gal with scrappy brown boots and longjohns shirt run the table for almost an hour. But be forewarned: It's rumored that he has a pool cue that looks like routine bar grade shit, but really it's a slick and masterly home piece he screws together in the bathroom and then adroitly cleans up the table with backspin and near perfect geometry. By the way, he's the same red-faced, baseball-capped guy who belted out all the pain and misery of the Unsane before he skipped town and founded the Cutthroats 9. So welcome to the new wave of noisecore.

Unsane was around for seven years before we got anywhere near playing some of the big shows the Cutthroats play. I am down with the Cutthroats until the end of time. I guess the guys from the Unsane want to tour again, but I don't really want to. The guys who replaced the other guys in the Unsane want to, but I am down with Will and the Cutthroats. I think that it's good shit. It's like crazy, hyper drums with slide guitar. It's a total music style that has never been done before.

Who has Will played with before?
Old Grandad, a band from San Francisco. They opened for the Unsane a few times. That's how I met him.

But the line up, and even the sound of the Unsane changed considerably over those years.
You got it, hence the name change. We were told by certain labels that if we changed the name of the Cutthroats 9 to the Unsane, they would give us our record deal back. Fuck you. That's all I have to say.

I lived in an art gallery for a long time. But it was my home, so I don't really consider it a gallery. It was mostly skater art, pro-skaters that had moved into art. They would show their work.

Did that art thing rub off on you at all?
No, I'm not really an art guy. I mean, my mom was in a bluegrass band. I'm really a grassroots musician guy. Like "'till death do us part" type musician.

Did she teach you how to play?
No, her friends did.

Did you start by playing bluegrass music?
I learned to play slide from a broken bottle at 12.

So who are the bands or people that drive your sound and attitude?
Hank Williams. Flipper. I used to go see the Dead Kennedys. I'm from New York, but my mom moved out to San Francisco. I used to go see Flipper, Black Flag, and Fear.

But what about the New York hardcore scene?

we mean it. we are not a novelty. we are guys getting it out of our system.

Your bassist Mark says he considers the Cutthroats a thinking man's band.
No, I think that Mark has mental problems and he's been in and out of mental institutions for a long time. I just think he's realizing the sub-par quality of our band.

This is your fourth tour with the Cutthroats. Unfortunately, the crowd was spotty tonight.
We realize you have to pay your dues in certain towns to get to the big towns. We'll play CBGBs and it's packed and we'll destroy everything and wreak havoc on New Yorkers. I grew up in New York, and these people have never seen anything like this. I mean they know me and the anger level of this music. It's more like the Who or something. We mean it. We are not a novelty. We are guys getting it out of our system, we're not some fake guys who want to be rock stars. I play to my friends. We just started out. We've only been out for a year and a half.

Do you feel that you have to bear the burden of the Unsane?
A lot of guys from labels put, featuring Chris Spencer from the Unsane and shit, and it fucking sucks. I hate it. I would rather be in a band and have that band be the band. I don't want my name all over it. I'm not some fucking rock personality. I'm actually just a musician who is part of a band. I think that is really bogus. People don't give a shit. People want to see a good band. When you feature one guy, nobody wants to see that band because they know its lame. Fuck that.

But speaking of the Unsane, I heard that you would break the mic in order to create that distorted vocal sound.
No. It's just a mic I stick down my throat when I want to. I don't alter it at all.

You used to be involved with an art space in New York?
I'm not really down with that. I used to go to CBGBs on Sunday.

For the Hardcore Matinee shows?
Yeah. I was down with the guys from Warzone. Ray was a good friend of mine.When I was a little kid, Ray would look out for me. But I really didn't like all that shit. I was too violent for that scene. I wanted to get in fights all the time. So, it was like Flipper, Flipper, Flipper! Ha! Ha! Ha!

Why the move out to the San Francisco area?
Me and my brother fixed up a big piece of land. I got my own park. My own Central Park. My brother and I have been working a lot.

You said the new EP is even more brutal or hard-edged than the first album?
I wouldn't say hard-edged, but better production. A friend of mine worked in a really good studio, so we hung out there.



Was the process of making it different?
Yeah, slightly. We had better recording equipment. We recorded where Fleetwood Mac recorded.

You and your mother used to play cards a lot.
Me and my mother played gin.

What are some secret strategies?
There's nothing I could tell you. It's just strategy. It's all part of anything you do, to be intelligent, work on it, and build it into something that is really proficient.

Can you tell us about the tattoo and scar across your belly?
What scar? I don't have any scars, I don't have any tattoos. I don't know what you are talking about.



they cut me open and took out all my internal organs.

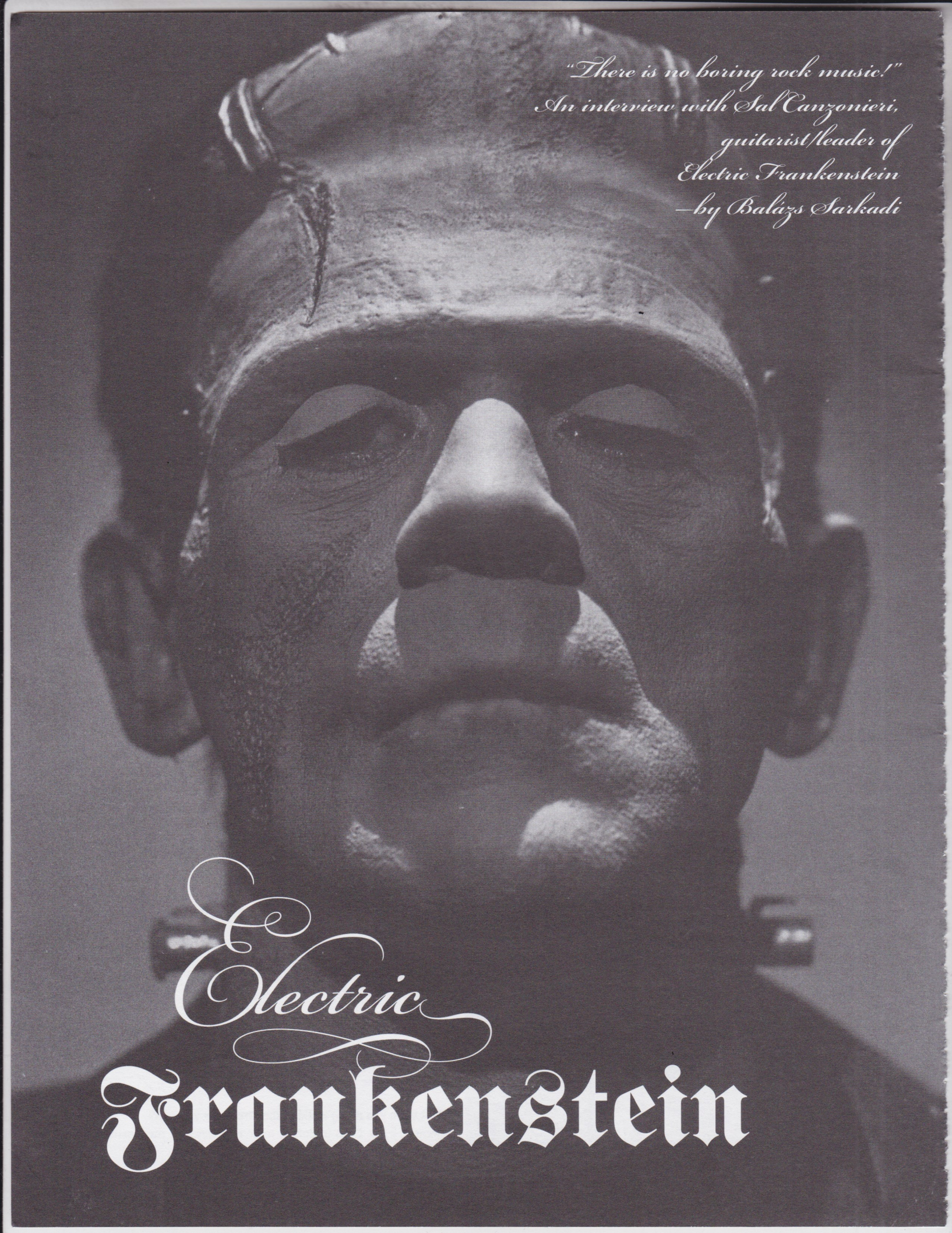
C'mon man.
I was jumped.

In Europe.
In Austria, in Vienna. They thought I was in the service. I was beaten, knocked from behind, like knocked unconscious from behind with a piece of wood or something, then kicked in the head and body for an extended period of time. They lacerated my small intestine. Sealed my eye closed. Put my tooth through my lip. My whole side of my head was black. I was in the hospital, and I woke up on the gurney bleeding all over the place. I walked out of the hospital, and walked back to the hotel and took a shower, then went back to the hospital because I was in extreme pain. The guy said, you should have been dead by now. They cut me open and took out all my internal organs and part of my small intestine. They had to check all my organs and make sure they weren't bruised irreparably and bleeding. They stapled me back together and put a tube in my side and laid me to suffer with an old man who got two blood transfusions a night and wailed like an animal because he wanted to die so bad.



These guys were like Nazi skins?
No, no. Like fucking bullshit white German homeboys. Fuck them. They are fucking pussies. What are they doing picking on one guy? Fuck you. Come to New York.

What were you doing walking the streets by yourself?
I went to a bar. I was in Europe to do interviews for the Unsane. I left when the bar closed, and I got accosted.



"There is no boring rock music!"
An interview with Sal Canzonieri,
guitarist/leader of
Electric Frankenstein
—by Balázs Sárkádi

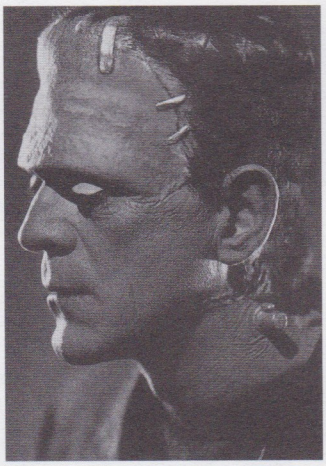
Electric Frankenstein

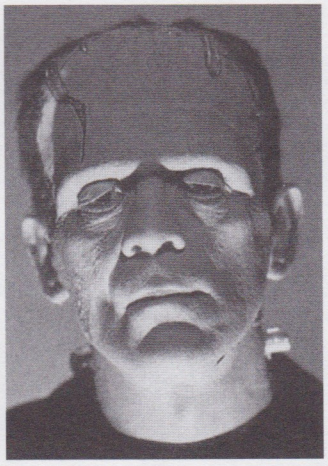
This April was a very sad month because of the losses of both Ed "Big Daddy" Roth and Joey Ramone, who were both your major influences. Did these tragic events influence your songwriting for the forthcoming new album? I've read somewhere that a few years back there were plans of Joey recording a song with you. Did that ever happen?

We were in the middle of recording when the phone rang and people called the studio to tell us that Joey had just died a few hours before. It made us very sad and it was hard to concentrate when recording that day. We were in a daze and it seemed like it wasn't real, like it was impossible for the world to not have him around. Both deaths made us feel that one book was closing and another was opening and we had a strong feeling that we had a mission to continue and grow what Big Daddy and Joey had started. We also had the death of Rik L Rik, who did one album and some shows with us too that was influencing our feelings. We were waiting for when Joey was going to be free to record some songs with us, we were writing them and then he slipped and broke his hip in the winter, which led to his eventual death by cancer. So, we never got the chance to record with him, we had a strong feeling of regret about this and wished that there had been more time. It shows you that you think there will always be more time but sometimes something happens to interfere with your plans, which means that you have to do things right away or you may never have the chance to do it.









You started the band in 1992 to display that rock'n'roll was not dead by combining the best elements of 40 years of the genre's history from '50s rockabilly through hard rock, garage, punk etc. By the late '90s a similar movement emerged in Scandinavia, with its flagship bands the Backyard Babies and the Hellacopters securing major label deals. How do you relate to these bands? Do you think their major label deals had a negative or a positive impact on that scene? Did you like Turbonegro?

We actually started in 1991 and we are touring Europe this fall for our 10th anniversary! *(The tour was later canceled—Balázs)* Well, when we started we got popular right away in the US and soon in Europe, people were grabbing our early material as soon as they could find it. We were getting letters and such from people who were working on the same themes as us from Scandinavia, we have letters from Nicke from the Hellacopters and we did early shows in Sweden with Turbonegro and Gluecifer. I think that it was just the right time for this kind of high energy rock'n roll to exist and like punk did before in the late 1970s, it started all over the world at the same time. The New Bomb Turks, Devil Dogs, and Supersuckers were a big influence on a lot of European bands too. We relate to these bands as one big worldwide scene and we work together to make rock'n'roll king again, I don't think we compete with each other, we help each other instead. I think that major labels are always stupid and don't know how to do anything anymore to sell records successfully except by lying, cheating, and bribing. Major labels are a big rip off and only work to exploit and ruin bands. By the end of the year on a major label bands find out that they are way in debt to them and in financial ruin, which means that the major labels work just like the mafia! I love Turbonegro, we did two shows with them, in Sweden and the US. They are funny and make great records, even though their songs are taken from a lot of other people's music, ha hah.

I know you can get very passionate when the "anti-rock conspiracy" is mentioned. Are you sure that the shift to electronica in the '90s was arranged by the majors, and it wasn't just that people heard too much boring rock music and were looking for something new? And what is exactly the "new rock revolution"?

There is no boring rock music! Don't confuse real rock'n'roll with what is known as Alternative Music, which is truly boring. Alternative music is not rock and people can't remember the songs after they hear the records. Real rock'n'roll is exciting and the songs are unforgettable. The majors are afraid of rock'n'roll because they can not control it and so they support and create fake trends instead that makes it so that people only get the music that they are allowed to get by the major labels. And, when major labels do release what they call rock bands, they are usually fake and write lousy songs and then when the sales are low instead of accepting responsibility for making a shitty record, they blame rock'n'roll and say that people are not buying rock'n'roll. See how they twist things? There was nothing new about Electronica, there was always bands like that around and the problem is that the songs sound trendy and corny after a few months and don't stand up to the test of time. Real rock'n'roll songs always sound great whenever they are heard, they never die. For example any song by The Who, Kinks, Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, AC/DC, NY Dolls, Dead Boys, Stooges, MC5, etc., always sound great and inspiring and exciting! The "New Rock Revolution" is the present day movement by new rock'n'roll bands to make the music scene cool and exciting again. People care about how they look *(not like baggy pants sloppy idiots who listen to Limp Biscuit!)*, the bands care about being on stage and writing exciting songs and doing an exciting show, and also the bands care about their fans because they are fans too. The New Rock is rock'n'roll that has been influenced by punk. So it is mixing high quality song arrangements of hard rock ('70s) and with hooks from garage rock ('60s) and leads from grunge rock ('90s) and also the attitude of punk and the power of heavy metal with the rhythms of '50s rock'n'roll and R&B and the soul of 1940s blues to create something new for today. The New Rock Revolution is the worldwide movement of bands and fans that are revitalizing rock'n'roll for the 21st century. Nothing has lasted this long, rock'n'roll is the longest lasting popular music because it satisfies people deep into their soul and recharges people with energy!

I've read that you were present at many of the most important early punk shows with the Ramones, Misfits, Minor Threat and so on. Could you share with us some of your most vivid memories from this era?

Well, sure I was there at all the NYC and NJ shows by all the original punk bands and I was a part of the huge inspiring time period. People were super happy to be free to create great music that wasn't phony and tainted by major labels. It was scary and wild to be at the first Ramones, Misfits, Dead Boys, etc., shows, it felt like the bands were going to smash their instruments at any moment and jump into the audience and smash everything! It was always exciting and charged up to be at these shows. Every band was great and unique sounding, they weren't all copy cats of each other like bands from today are. Each band, even though they played "punk," sounded totally original and it was easy to remember their songs.

You put out a huge number of seven inches and other recordings on a great number of labels, but it's already the third full-length that you will release on Victory. Can we say that you finally found a label that fits you the best? If you ever signed a major deal, what would be your conditions?

The reason I had a lot of releases on different labels was because I never signed with any of them, they all contacted me because they loved EF and wanted at least one record on their label. Mostly because there was a big demand for our music by the fans. Also, since we weren't funded by a major label, we needed to get our records in as many places as we could so people could get to them. Each label had their records sold by a different distributor, which means that eventually we had our music sold by 40 different distributors! That was our plan to get popular fast and have at least one EF record in every record store in the world, and guess what: we succeeded! Now, with Victory, it was time to move on to a bigger label that could take care of us more, so we had a two record deal with Victory and we did 3 records with them! Now, the band is even bigger and it is time to keep moving on. If we were ever on a major label the conditions would be that we don't get ripped off, that they have me involved in the marketing of the record and that they let me have my own label to help other great bands get noticed!

I've read you were planning to put out a free Best Of album. How would that be distributed and when would it come out?

It will be distributed free in magazines and given away at shows and in record stores. It will be out next year.

What do you think of Zeke? How would you rate their music?

Zeke are a fun band to see live. I like their slower songs more, sometimes the newer songs are too fast and they lose some groove. But they are clearly a powerful rock'n'roll band with some great songs!

Is that true that you were pouring blood from buckets on the audience at gigs with your earlier band, The Thing? How was that received? Do you use any such "special effects" at EF shows?

Yes, we did that, we had buckets of pig's blood that we bought from a butcher store and we dumped it on the audience and also live worms! People screamed and loved it! We (The Thing) have a spooky show with all kinds of lighting and effects and vampire dancers, etc. Well, we don't use special effects with EF, but everyone wants us to do so. So, when we get more money behind us, we will use that to make some really cool shows!



An interview with Paul McKenzie, head of the McKenzie clan
—by Balázs Sarkadi

You guys are often being compared to the Dropkick Murphys, but I think the main difference is that you don't really take yourselves too seriously. Do you agree, and do you regard them as competition?
Number 1: The Dropkicks are the same type of music, but (when you take the time to listen) you will find vast differences in the recording sounds, the guitars & bagpipes are very different, not to mention writing style. Real Mckenzies have a "canadian scottish" influence & flavor, where the Dropkicks are Irish Oi based that just happen to employ a bagpipe as well. As for taking ourselves seriously, check our track record! See how we write & tour. Just because we don't beat a big "serious" drum does not mean we are not serious about our business, which is entertaining people. But we have lots of fun too cause that's our nature. The Dropkick Murphys are a great band and I can't wait to meet them.

As far as I know there have been several line-up changes in the band since you started in 1995, and by now there are only two original members left. Why is it so? (I guess Dirty Kurt and Paul must be the two founders, right?)
Yes! Some people just have to move on, that's life. I guess it ultimately comes down to a question of priority. For Kurt & I (as well as the others in the band)it kinda looks like our #1 priority is playing in the best punk rock band ever, as we are constantly writing, recording, and playing live. I think playing live is one of the best things for me on the face of the planet, as for founding members perhaps credit should go to the people who inspired us to carry on in their footsteps. People like Robbie Burns, Andy Stewart, Alex Harvey, and many more. Kurt & I are hopelessly addicted to punk/ rock & roll. It's far too late for us to turn back now. Too late! It's do or die I suppose.

I know Vancouver has strong Celtic traditions, but maybe in Europe some people are skeptical to accept you as real Scots since you speak with a Northern American accent. What was the reaction to your shows in Scotland? Actually, was having a Scottish ancestry really a basic condition when recruiting new members to the band?
Perhaps it would be best to read up on the history of ancient Scotland, and maybe find out just why there were so many Scottish exiled. Not only to N. America but to other places around the world. The Scots held onto their tradition and lifestyle & passed them down to us! People freak out and think that we are the "dogs knees" (this is an endearing term). Check out "punk rock Scotland" on the web & read their reviews, we just love Scotland. We want to live there for awhile. Judging from the many shows we've done in Scotland, people have a great deal of fun at our shows, so do we! I think it's good personality & musicianship and everyone looks good in a kilt really.

The new album is entitled *Loch'd and Loaded*. What does this title mean?
Loch'd: having had fallen in to the Loch, as a result of some sort of impairment. Loaded: A term used to describe someone who has ingested enough substance to actually lose balance & fall into a "loch" (see loch) Loch: A channel of deep water (often found in Scotland) Also a term used by people who use weapons. Breech, "Locked" & loaded.

Which one do you prefer, Braveheart (with Mel Gibson) or Trainspotting, and why?
Didn't really enjoy either, really. Although the true story of what really happened is far more interesting. Try listening to "Scots Wha' Ha'e"! Those hollywood guys are always taking a perfectly good story and turning it into pure crap. Thanks again Mel! I do like Irvine Welsh & I do like his films. However, romanticizing heroin use is a cheap "sensation" trick. And making money on something which is so tragic & such a problem. Trainspotting has it's moments but in my opinion junkies are such a waste.

I found some strange references in your biography. So how did that close encounter with that UFO in Nevada happen? Are you sure it wasn't just drinking too much whiskey that caused this experience?
I can assure you, sir that the taking of whisky had nothing to do with it! They thought it was a vehicle on the road approaching them. The driver said the lights were not regular, then it raised up from the road and aggressively tried to run them off the lonely desert road not far from Area 51. I was not there but judging by their shock I have no reason not to believe it.

Suppose there is a line-up change sometime in the future, would you let a straight edge person join? A guy whose 100% Scottish, an excellent musician, a punk rocker, but one who refuses to drink. What would you tell him?
We have had individuals as you describe in our band at one time or another. As long as they don't get snitty about our drunken carrying ons & screaming all night & "experimenting" with them as they try to sleep & draw all over them with felt pen & make them wet the bed with the old "hand in warm water" routine, *then* they are more than welcome to stay. They generally run in fear & file restraining orders with the police. I have been put in jail for ex-band members calling the cops on me.

Which show was the most memorable from your last European tour and why?
Hamburg Germany, St. Pauli Team Show: 35,000 screaming punk rock, biker, pirate types! Felt right at home. Got to show my butt to all of them and 10 million at home on the TV. The beer & sandwiches were good too. Did I mention the punk rock girls?

Do you often have female fans in the first row at gigs eagerly wishing to check out if you wear anything under your kilts?
Yes, we want to make it perfectly clear that we adore *all* of our loyal fans & their mothers. Especially excellent punk rock girls.

What are the first three things that come to your mind about Hungary (if anything)?
What do you mean, if anything? Who do you think you are talking to? I know that Hungary was the center of our culture in the early part of the last millennia! I know that Hungary resisted Russian invasion in 1964 *(sic!)*. And as a result I have many Hungarian/Canadian friends who escaped to Canada. I also know Hungarian girls are beautiful.

What are your goals with the band, what would you like to achieve in the next few years?
Do a show on the moon with all our friends & party favors with a PA big enough to be heard on earth. Then plant the Scottish flag there too! Get in touch with Von Zeppelin's great grandson & get him to make us a zeppelin in the shape of a huge haggis for a world tour and go to England and drop haggis on Led Zeppelins house cause I despise their music so...(their fans tortured me with their music & still do)

Which are the three bands that had the biggest influence on you?
You must understand that there are 6 members in the band, each of whom has their own personal favorites and influences, both popular & for the most part obscure. We are each interested individually & eclectically in all kinds of music, writing, film, and all sorts of artistic mediums. We just love punk rock because (as everyone knows) it's the best! Ok, Ok... MC5, Damned, Sex Pistols, Iggy & the Stooges, Clash, Albertos Los Trios Paranoious, Snake Finger, Alex Harvey, Robert Burns...



Is Matthew really a world champion at bagpipe playing?
If you mean that he has played around the world, and is a "champion", then yes... he is! •

THE FAINT





Yes, Virginia, there are new wavers. That genre, once derided as hollow and lightweight crass commercialism by punk rock, its pissed-off sister, has now risen like a sphinx. Super 1980s radio stations like 106.9 the Point, with its heavy rotation of Flock of Seagulls and Missing Persons give us daily flashbacks of parachute pants and Miami Vice, and local Houston stalwarts Japanic reanimate the form by injecting equal parts Motown and post-modernism. Whereas New Wave supposedly embodied escapism, punk pushed raw power and grassroots integrity, but the Faint fudge the boundaries by putting both musical karate chops and lyrical whiz into the New Wave revival by making punk their foundation, and new wave their transmitter.

Twenty years ago, Ultravox made warm thrusting guitars the backbone of new wave. In contrast, Bronksi Beat tossed aside guitars and put a dance-beat spin on the genre; furthermore, their lyrics and attitude were molded around the politics of sexual identity, specifically homosexuality. Now flash forward. Young and feisty, The Faint have absorbed a former death metal guitarist into their ranks, yet have only a trace of guitar left in them, and write songs about classical conductors and the bitterness of rank and file service workers in low wage America. And it's every bit as pithy and sentimental as it sounds.

They began as folk pop devotees in 1994, plugging away at their lo-fi pop aesthetic in the ripe Nebraska night. By the time they recorded *Blank-Wave Arcade* (1999) they shifted towards basement bound tinkering with keyboards. Barely able to contain their stylistic morphing and pop star ambition, they upped the ante on their newest, *Danse Macabre*, and have made a record chock-full of hip-shaking groove, dark interiors, and electronic bombast.

It's a compelling package. The first track "Agenda Suicide" bluntly pokes at the empty rhetoric of the Protestant work ethic, "our work makes pretty little homes/...the drones work hard before they die," and "Total Job" continues the harping. Is this the Ecstasy generation's *Das Kapital*, where instead of cold Karl Marx, we have sweaty hipsters tossing around in 1980s lookalike clothing? Turn to the end note "Ballad of a Paralyzed Citizen" for more clues.

The Faint are not loners. A few years back, the Calculators, a group of skinny-tie kids with a fondness for early Cure, made a dent in the scene, and even Man or Astro-Man?, known for futuristic sci-fi surf hybrids, have become synthesizer-centric. But it's the total musical abandon of the Faint, their thrust of dance club sensibilities on top of a punk underbelly, that make them worthy of a long, hard, seductive stare. So tell your friends- New Wave is Dead, Long Live New Wave!

An interview with Todd Baechle (singer), Dapose (guitarist), and Jacob Thiele (keyboards) of the Faint:

Why choose the vinyl-only format for the new EP when you've said that vinyl is expensive to make and hard to sell?

Todd: So the people who really like our band are the only people who buy it.

Dapose: Well, the other half is that we also hope to get some club play. It's got 45 speed play for the DJ factor.

What's interesting is that non-loyal fans will be exposed anyway simply because of club play?

Todd: I think we think of it kind of like they're bonus tracks or something. The reason we didn't put a cover on the record is because we haven't put cover songs on our records so far. We like that, and we wanted to put it out.

Why record a cover and not put it out?

Todd: I think we think of the album as the important part. You put out singles, EPs, or whatever, but you really try to sell the albums. The other things are just to continue putting out things and keep people's attention.

How does the show change when you guys begin playing these large venues (350 people showed up), considering that the clubs might want a larger set, but your set is programmed for thirty minutes, right?

Todd: Sorta. The songs are programmed, and we have a set list, but we can change songs.

Dapose: The way it has been in the past is that we would only have so much material ready so people complained about short lists, but it just wasn't possible for us to play anything else.

Todd: We learned more songs before this tour. We can play for a while. We kind of decide how long we're going to play based on how many people come, and if they seemed interested in the band, like fans, or if they're just people...



I KIND OF DROPPED OUT OF SCHOOL TO BE IN THE BAND. I STILL HAVE THIS CRAVING FOR LEARNING...INSTEAD OF TAKING CLASSES ABOUT DESIGN, I JUST TRY TO LEARN MORE ABOUT SYNTHESIZERS. – DAPOSE

When you first played the South, you said it was a bit scary, but as more and more people seem to know the songs, does it make the experience different?

Dapose: Even on the same tour the shows vary quite a bit. The last tour there was a bit of interest, and with this tour there seems to be a lot of interest. But every town is different, definitely.

Todd: Crowds range from 15 to maybe 1,500 depending on where you are.

But in Omaha, you can sell out two shows, and bring out 1,000 people?

Todd: I don't know. We haven't played one show in Omaha recently, and that was our biggest show so far.

The theatrical aspect of your show seems important. Is that something specially conceived of before the tour?

Todd: All we do now is set a mood for our show.

Dapose: Visually, I think.

Todd: What I've said before about a show being theatrical or a spectacle has to do with the idea that I think it would be fun if it was like that. Maybe it will be sometime, but it's not now. I don't think so.

Dapose: It's rock music.

But visuals are very important to the band. You brought a computer into the studio so you could work on the album art as you made the new record.

Dapose: I think we felt that we could utilize our time better, and also we wanted it to relate to the album as best it could.

So you wanted a feeling of immediacy?

Todd: We wanted to send it off when we were done recording it.

Earlier themes that the band has explored include sex and death, and bodies in motion, so are those themes ways of getting you excited in the album project?

Dapose: We kind of write about whatever is happening at the time, and that becomes the theme. If you write a certain number of songs over a period of time, I think there's got to be a unifying theme to them regardless.

Todd: We just try...

Dapose: We just try to be conscious of it.

So is it premeditated at all?

Dapose: By conscious, I think we mean applying the lyrics to the music in an appropriate way. Conscious of the way the music sounds and how we can incorporate the words to the sound, like not having a dark sound that has happy lyrics.

Todd: Which can be a good effect, it's just that if we did it, it would be conscious. I just say that everything we do is really conscious I suppose.

You were a music major in college?

Todd: Yeah.

Dapose: But I think that consciousness is part of our personality.

So you would do it this way regardless of schooling?

Todd: Yeah. We're always learning how to be a better band. We're always thinking that we're improving our band.

Dapose: I kind of dropped out of school to be in the band. I still have this craving for learning...

Which happens within the band?

Todd: Yes, it's like instead of taking classes about design, I just try to learn more about synthesizers.

You've said that the reason you might sound a bit retro is because you are using instruments that you can afford, which end up being instruments that were used 15 or 20 years ago. Do those limitations really shape the sound of the songs?

Todd: That was mostly on our last record. But we definitely don't think let's try and do a new wave record exactly as we can, or make it sound exactly like a new wave record. We try and incorporate all of our other influences.

Like?

Todd: It doesn't really matter. I think there's tricks from all kinds of music that you can use. I like folk song melodies, where it's really flat for a long time and just small indications, where the focus is on stories, or like metal riffs, or reggae rhythms, or reggae bass guitar, classical harmony, but whatever it is will become more clear as we make more records and show that we are influenced by a lot of that stuff. The new record is influenced a lot by our last record because we played it so many times and toured and toured.

But the last record resembled the Make Up's sound verite style, where you make it sound live as possible, but the production on the new record is kicked up a notch or two.

Todd: I think a lot of it is about the art of listening. It seems like its less about what you actually play, make, and write than it is what you can hear and understand. It's hard to explain. It's just that I think it's just as important to be able to listen to a song and get everything out of it. It is more important than writing a pretty good song.

Listening as a proactive exercise, or as Barthe says, "listening speaks?"

Todd: Well, I think everybody does that, but I think it's a slightly overlooked deal.

You wanted the lyrics to be more straightforward this time.

Todd: Less ambiguous. Yes.

A lot of songs on the new record revolve around work, especially in low wage consumer economy. Like Gang of Four, even though people might just see you as a dance band, there's a strong, poignant message underneath.

Todd: Dance your ass off at the show then listen to the topics when you're at home.

Dapose: Don't listen to the lyrics at the same time you listen to the record.

Todd: You don't think?



DANCE YOUR ASS OFF AT THE SHOW THEN LISTEN TO THE TOPICS WHEN YOU'RE AT HOME.

Dapose: I'm not really into that. You should listen to the record at least once through before you read the lyrics along with it, or something.

Lyrics exist separate for you?
Dapose: They're not separate.
Todd: I prefer to listen to a record and get a feel for the songs first.

You said you would never jump through hoops to get on a major label.
Todd: *(laughs)* I thought you were going to ask, what would I do? It's not about that at all. We have no interest in that. If I had a winning Lotto card, I may find something to do with the money, but…It's not any more important to me than coming up with a new song. It's not about money for us at all.

But don't you want your records to be available to kids in rural Nebraska?
Todd: There's the Internet now. A lot of people have that. You go to a library if you're interested in things.

Listeners should basically get up and get what they want. Be proactive.
Todd: Right. If they're into music, and I am into music, so I can sympathize. If they find out about us, that's cool. If not…

On the last tour you were recording on a four track in the van?
Todd: We recorded, well we used a sequencer and a laptop, programs and things. We made mock songs.

Was it gratifying, maybe even more than a 24 track studio?
Todd: It's more like a practice, more like having band practice. Because practice for us is not like put on our instruments and go down to the basement and jam. Sometimes it is. But it's just really rare that we do that. It's more likely that one of us would say, hey, I've got this, so play this beat with this, do you guys like it?

Who's most responsible for generating songs?
Todd: Nobody. No one person. It's completely a joint thing. The vocal melody is my job, and lyrics, and sometimes we'll throw away music because I can't some up with anything.

You have to love it before putting it on record.
Todd: I have to love before it even turns into a song. I have to feel like it's correct. It has to feel like one of our songs, or it has to feel like it's something I want to be one of our songs. Then if I like it, then everybody else has to decide whether they like it. We don't work on songs unless we really like them. We just don't finish songs and choose from those. It takes a long time.

When you first started, you played guitar in the band, but got bored with playing guitar in an indie rock band. But will there be a time when you get bored with playing keyboards too?
Todd: Well, maybe. We're not stuck in a thing where we feel we have to use keyboards. Right now, we're trying to make electronic dance music, so it's working out, mostly with keyboards. We definitely are interested in using acoustic instruments and any instrument that we can think of that might be good for the part.

What led you to the dance sensibilities?
Todd: It was a reaction to where we were on our first record, playing songs that were not whole lot of fun to play. I felt like every other band. It could be more fun for us and the band if we had more upbeat types of songs, dance type of songs. That's how I think we ended up going in that direction. We chose the keyboards because they could do a lot more than guitar. Plus, they were fresh to us, new in general. We always had keyboards in the band since we started, but since that point where we changed I think we've become more interested in the ways we can makes sounds ourselves, because with guitar you can combine petals or play in your own style, but that's kind of all you can do. With keyboards, you can do anything you want, and make it sound like anything you can think of, or you can accidentally find out there's a sound that no one has ever heard…

And save it.
Todd: It's more interesting to me right now as songwriter in the band.

Name me some bands, whether for lyrics or melodies, that are maybe examples to you as things to stick to in terms of purity or artfulness.
Todd: Well, I'm a big fan of the singer of Bright Eyes. I think he's probably the best songwriter that I have heard, at least in terms of writing right now, at least in terms of a

person who isn't a household name. The closer I can…Well, I find myself…Well, he just keeps getting better and better, so I just try and learn from what he has done. We've been friends for a long time, my first songs were written with him.

He has a particular type of fan that gravitates towards him, at least that's what you've said about his web page discussion list.
Todd: I don't think they have a name. I think that they are just moody, slightly insecure sometimes, but we all are. I think that his songs really speak for those people, and I am more into it because the craft of it all.

Between Cursive and the Faint, Omaha is exploding. Does being outside the loop give you a unique place to make your music, rather than being bogged down by the trends of New York City?
Todd: I think we would have a reaction to our surroundings no matter where we were. It's just harder to have a reaction in bigger cities because there's so many things going on. That's the only way I can explain my hypothesis of what we would be like if we came from a bigger city. I also think its important to know what's out there, and living in New York you could know a little bit better.

But you said if you are an active listener and have the Internet, it shouldn't be a problem.
Todd: Yeah, anybody could…

Be on the curve.
Todd: But when we first started touring, when we first played New York and Chicago, I felt like the bands that we would play with… Well, we were opening all the shows because no one had heard of us, but sometimes we saw the bands I had heard of, but they all seemed to be trying especially hard to stand out. Every band that I saw seemed to be trying really hard to stand out, and I could see how that was helpful to them in that they had a lot of competition in Chicago or New York, but it seemed kind of forced that way. But I like living in Omaha, and it's easier to live as an artist without having a job. It's central. We grew up there, and have a lot of respect for a lot of musicians that live there.

You are tight knit with these people?
Todd: I would say so. I think our sound has been a reaction to what our friends have been doing, so we don't want to do what they are doing, we want to do something else. At one point, all the bands sounded just the same. Not exactly, but it was like a songwriting thing, where everybody was trying to write a great song, not realizing that these were all the same band almost. This song could go with any of these bands.

Some people assume you went to a record store and picked up records by people from Suicide to Ultravox, but you're saying it was more like being inspired by your friends?
Todd: Yeah, we're a song-oriented band. The instrumentation has changed, but that was just based on what we felt like playing, and not necessarily picking up a certain band's record that we didn't know about before and go yeah! We started playing more keyboards in the band, and ended up thinking, this is kind of cool. We ended up playing new wave type of music because of the instruments and the fact that we really don't know how to play them, like back in the early 1980s, when people really didn't have that much to work with. We kind of looked at it like, we're going to do a new wave themed record, but do it our own way. We haven't tried to stick with that, but have been influenced by it.

Are you going back in the studio after tour?
Todd: After the tour, I think we are going our separate ways. I'm hoping to go somewhere remote and we're considering all buying laptops and writing music separately.

Then put it together.
Todd: Yeah. Email them to each other or whatever, or put them up on a web site that we could communicate through.

So the music does not depend on the live experience?
Todd: Well, we wouldn't just put out whatever we made on our laptops. We'd bring it together and make it a definite thing with the band. We usually plan out the songs and go into the studio with it. We probably haven't played it all the way out the way we imagined it would sound, and we just keep recording the parts that we want until it comes out the way we imagined it while not forgetting any of the parts we had planned for. Afterwards, we figure out how we are going to play it live. That way we are not limited by, I can't play this part because what about playing live.

What's the most frustrating part about using keyboards?
Todd: Old ones are especially frustrating because the ones we've had…

Wear and tear?
Todd: Well, a lot of times we'll play in clubs in basements and it becomes so humid from the dampness and the show that the keyboard will play more than one note at a time, or it will turn off, or only play one note. They're not real reliable. Apart from that, I'm not interested in those old keyboards anymore because I've heard pretty much every sound they can make.
Jacob: They've been around so much that so many people have used them already too.

You can't really develop a sound that is yours, especially because they are not good enough machines to be able to manipulate them in any way that you want.
Jacob: New synthesizers have built in effects that offer many more possibilities.

But what's the most frustrating thing?
Jacob: I don't think its frustrating at all.
Todd: I know, but carrying keyboard stands. There's no good way to carry a keyboard stand.
Jacob: Exactly

THERE'S NO GOOD WAY TO CARRY A KEYBOARD STAND.





Courtesy of DeSoto Records

J. ROBBINS

Steadfast should be Jay Robbins' middle name. As throbbing bass player for Washington D.C's godfathers of punk Government Issue during the late-1980s, or as angular, jazz-inflected guitarist and clean-voiced, free-wheeling singer poet for post-punks Jawbox, and now as the same captain of cool for Burning Airlines, Robbins has always put integrity above profit while making albums that sound wide-open one minute, and restrained the next.

Whereas late era Government Issue yanked a few elements from the Damned and, along with Scream, put rock'n'roll back into the D.C. soundscape, Jawbox shifted gears towards more abstract and stylized sound structures that left listeners both enthralled and vexed. Between their well-honed, seminal albums "For Your Own Special Heart" (Atlantic, 1994) and "Jawbox" (Atlantic, 1996), Robbins charged ahead by writing lyrics that felt like Bob Dylan's leftover notes from *Tarantula*, and played with popular punk tastes by delving into covers of Joy Division, Big Boys, and the Avengers.

Burning Airlines continues the same trajectory, but flirts with early, oddball XTC and big guitar music while not giving up their trademark funky and ferocious drumming. There's even acoustic touches, and, yikes, balladry. Lumped in with Shellac as post-punk saviors, Burning Airlines proves that music is still a wishing well, and their live shows prove that Robbins is always ready for the metaphoric kill.

You once said that not making music would be a bad thing for you. Explain.

I kind of feel that it's a self-explanatory remark. Because I can't imagine a life without it, though sometimes not going on the road and eating breakfast at Denny's every morning and sleeping on the floor seems like a good idea. But making music seems essential.

You could never walk away and just produce bands?

Even if we broke up this band tomorrow and I decided I was going to work in the studio for the rest of my life, you know I love working in the studio, I would still want to be making music somehow. It's just essential. At the point when my old band Jawbox broke up, I tried to be a graphic designer for about a year. I had little ideas for songs, but I was so bummed that I didn't have a band. I had no place to take these songs to, no one to work them out with, and I was working all the time at my job. At first, I was like, this was the new era of my life where I will get fulfillment from this other kind of work. And I really started to hate it very quickly. And the minute we started playing together in this band everything just got better. It was just like, yes! All this music stuff that was getting backed up in my head had an outlet, and it just felt really good, so I kind of took that as a lesson.

Supposedly, Burning Airlines' *Mission Impossible* was a record you had wanted to make for a long time. Why?

It's funny, because I don't necessarily feel that's true. My approach to doing music is much more in the moment than doing that. Rather than envisioning a goal and then trying to achieve it, it's like sitting down and seeing what comes out and seeing where it leads you. Next thing, you have parts of a song, and put it together with everybody, and you keep doing that until you have a bunch and see what works on a record. It's more process-driven and not so much like, well, we've done two records of three minute pop songs so now it's time to conquer the rock opera.

Time for *Tommy* (The Who)!

Exactly. So what was cool about starting this band and doing the first record was that it was the record I had been waiting to make for a long time in the sense that it was the first record I made from a position of confidence, as opposed to total self-doubt. Like I was pretty sure when we were making that record that we had a good idea of how things should sound and we were going to execute it well. I didn't know necessarily that it was going to be a good record, but I knew that we could do what we set out to do and we were going to have fun doing it and it would be the best record we could make. At the end of it all, we were really happy with it, which is why we started coming out and touring. So this record is the first record this band has made as a band.

As a cohesive unit.

Yeah, here we are, we've gone out on tour a bunch. I mean, Bill and I were tight to a certain extent because we toured together in Jawbox so much.

But with Jawbox, I've heard that it was almost like hand to hand combat with everybody putting his or her hands on a song and shaping it. Even a song that you might bring in almost done ended up morphing quite a bit, which I imagine was frustrating.

But it's also one of the beautiful things about having a band. I never enjoyed the idea of being a dictator. I mean, there's some songs in this band that I can point to and say, I am the songwriter of that song. That is my song, but only in the sense that it emerged from the group process without being radically altered from what I initially heard in my head. I think that we are all more comfortable with the idea that someone comes in, and the person is usually me, with a vision, or broad idea of where the song goes. And then it's a much more finished skeleton that gets built into the whole arrangement, whereas with Jawbox it was like start jamming and get a headache and then hear when somebody else came across something you liked then you waved your arms and went, wait, wait, wait! What was that you just did? Do that again, do that again, and they'd be like, what are you talking about? It was everybody negotiating like that. It wasn't really like combative, but it was cacophonous and four egos secretly or publicly to some degree saying, it's my song.

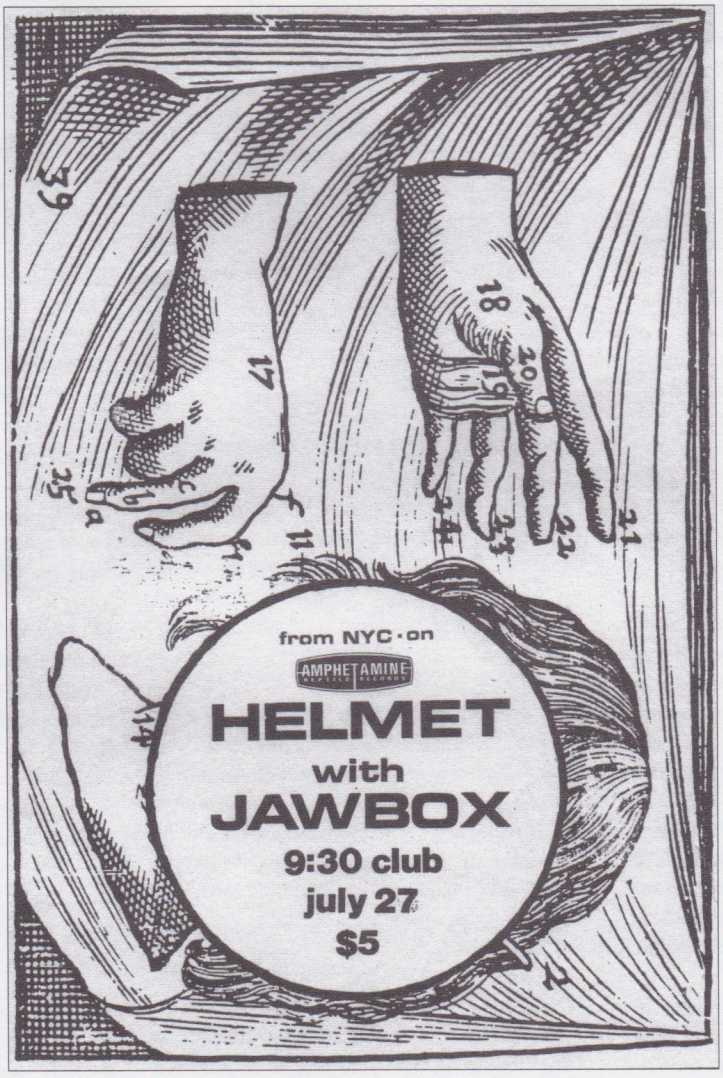
So it's just about another form of songwriting? For instance, you've talked about making your song lyrics more accessible.

A little bit, but I also have to, because I'm the only lyric writer in this band, where in Jawbox everything was collaborative. Some songs are more mine, and some songs pretty much everybody had their hand in. There's some songs in Jawbox where you really couldn't say whose it was, but it wouldn't have been a song if Zach hadn't written an amazing beat, and had a strong sense of what should go around it. Or at least a strong sense of what he didn't like. And everyone pitched in licks.



The Jawbox lyrics seem like free association, and sometimes barely hang together.

I think it's fairly still true with this band, though it's been a conscious effort to try and streamline the lyrics and make more coherent and immediate lyrics. But it's difficult for me to do because I am really addicted to a certain process, which is more like throwing out more interesting and cool things, well whose to say they are interesting and cool, I mean just putting together things that feel good to sing that are suggestive or something and jamming up a couple of those next to each other and see what kind of meaning they can create and where that leads. Kind of like free association almost in therapy. Like, what am I really trying to say when I have all this stuff.



That style is also epitomized by Jets to Brazil, and for a long time by Michael Stipe from REM.

The other thing is that I want to get them down to a fine point, but it's very difficult, because as a listener I really love lyrics that are rich in interpretations, ones that can be interpreted in many different ways. Like one of the things I get off on in life is contextualizing things in different ways, like digging up meaning in commonplace stuff, or different ideas about stuff you randomly write. Having fun with the way that meanings can spin off of things is really a great sort of pleasure for me creatively and in life, but when it comes to lyrics I sometimes let myself get astray in order to see where I am actually going. So I think the thing I want to do is to try and make sure that, I sound like such a hippie it's ridiculous…

Or like a beatnik?

If I'm going to do that process, I want to make sure that the point I'm led to is really clear to the person who is going to hear the song, because the more I do music and the more that I listen to songs, the ones that really stick to me are really direct.

Would that include Cole Porter?

Yeah, and those are songs that are really rich in imagery. You have no doubt. Like "Lush Life" is a strangely meandering, strangely constructed song with a lot of goofy internal rhymes, but what it is about is unquestionable. You totally feel it.

So the point is to reach a balance and create an interesting tension between lyrics and instrumentation.

That's the genius of Billy Strayhorn, who can write a lyric like "Lush Life," or Andy Partridge from XTC can write lyrics that can get off on their own internal rhymes and word play, but they have a really soulful, honest core that is communicating something of value and revealing something of the songwriter. That's an amazing gift to me, and I can't imagine even having it.

When I think about the covers done by Jawbox and Burning Airlines, like the Avengers, Minutemen, Cure, Big Boys, Echo and the Bunnymen and others, the music may morph considerably, but there's always a strong emphasis on the intensity of the lyrics.

That's really cool, thank you for listening so closely. It's actually really true. And this is something I've never talked to anybody about, even in the band. When I choose a cover, it's because the lyrics really speak to me and I feel like I can sing it with real conviction. Otherwise, it's like okay, let's have fun with the music. Though I think that Bunnymen cover is actually verbatim, there's just no brass.

The Avengers "Thin White Line" and Big Boys "Sound on Sound" are considerably morphed. But then you have the traditional version of the Buzzcocks' "Airwaves Dream."

To tell you the truth, the Buzzcocks cover is a

bit embarrassing, because we couldn't have done the Buzzcocks as good as they did themselves. And with the Big Boys, we couldn't have done a better arrangement than them. And with the Avengers, not only could you have not done it as good as them, but also Jawbox was never a band that was any good at playing a three chord punk song. It's music we really love, but we felt really stupid doing it. Beyond a certain point…Well, I know Bill felt this way, and I always felt this way, when I go to reach for a bar chord, when I'm just playing the chord, it's so satisfying. But if I try and make a song out of it, it's just impossible, and I just feel like I am cheating, like someone gave me a handicap. It takes a really special circumstance to be excused.

But though you have talked about streamlining the lyrics, and perhaps simplifying things a bit, on the new record you write on one song, "You can't trust a simple song."
That's a lyric you can look at from two sides. That was a bit of an accusation to me. That's me kind of accusing myself of being a cheap songwriter and just getting revenge. That's the raison d' etre for whatever I did for many years, like getting revenge in a song. And that's a little bit of cheating. And that's not the worst thing you can do as a songwriter, but if that's the only thing you do that's pretty sad. So that song, "Lexicon," is a little bit of me chastising myself and saying c'mon, rise above, you can do better than just write a song that doesn't just say, fuck you to stuff that pisses you off, couched in special secret terms. So that's one thing about it. I'm chastising myself and pointing a finger at myself because I can't trust a simple song.

You can't trust that three chord formula.
A lot of people have written great songs that way, but for me I feel lazy. And in some ways it's true, it's totally easy to be distrustful of a simple song, because if you just let shit happen, you get Blink 182, and that's not a good thing.

Another lyric is, "Don't say it again, try something new," which seems to echo the poet William Carlos Williams when he said, "Make it new" decades ago. But at what point does trying to make it new become used up or redundant?
I don't think so, just because I think that for me, at least in my experience, it's impossible to write with any other process. It's more about, what do I want to write about, like let's find some different things to write about.

So it's not about structure, but subject.
It's not about the structure of the song. Even if someone hears our band and thinks it's complicated, strange, art rock monstrosity, I guess I can see that. But to me it's simple, completely normal rock music. And when you break down our songs, they go verse chorus, verse chorus, bridge, chorus for the most part. I think that's a structure that has a lot of life left in it, because to me it's more about trying to find interesting ways for the four people in the band to get their ideas together and listen to each other. Like if a bass line leads in a certain way, it's about me trying to follow through with that process by coming up with a melody that works with it in a way that's satisfying and unexpected.

So again, what about subject matter?
Well, see, that's a new thing to me, because before I didn't feel that I had that much control over what I was going to write about. It was always just stuff that was eating at me that I couldn't deal with rationally, so I would make a little voodoo doll in the form of a song. Now, I really want to go beyond doing that. I'm really in awe of people that can choose a topic and write a song about it, like Phil Ochs, or Bob Dylan.

Like pointing to a headline in the paper and saying, that is it.
But Phil Och's best songs, to me, are his personal ones, like "Crucifixion." It's a crazy song, because it has these crazy rambling lyrics that feel like he is really upset. It doesn't really cohere, but you really know what it's about.

It might last longer than "Cops of the World" simply because of its intimacy.
But "Cops of the World" works in the world today! But with "Crucifixion," when you hear it, it really grips you, you know it's the result of seeing the death of JFK, but it's also about the loss of innocence. It's a fucking monster of a song. It's so amazing.

The new record has the song "Morricone Dancehall," while the last album had a clip from Orson Welles' *The Trial.* Did these have anything to do with your love of soundtrack music as a kid?
No, it's not a conscious one, because "Morricone Dancehall" happened because Mike had that bass line, which I was totally in love with, and both of us kind of had an infatuation with dancehall music, so we cooked up the dancehall beat on the drum machine, then I started jamming to his bass line, and I came up with…



When you say dancehall, do you mean r&b music?
Well, Jamaican dancehall music like Yellowman. Dancehall is pretty sick music. It's so minimal and stripped down, with nothing but voice and a rhythm, and it's so aggressive. It's not even like hip hop beats that can be kind of laid back. So anyway, I had this guitar line that I thought sounded like a spaghetti western, so it was just a working title that stuck.

I know you loved Beethoven's *7th Symphony*, so how did listening to that and Tangerine Dream at an early age shape your idea of creating a whole soundscape with each song?
Well, I don't really know, but I know that because I listened to a lot of film music when I was younger, it kind of fucked up my ideas of song structures. Maybe that's why now I love verse chorus verse chorus etc., because film music, in a way, is the worst music to listen to because it has no structure at all, because it's structured around the visuals.

That's why I suppose it's called incidental music.
It really responds and heightens. The form of film music is dictated by whatever the action it is trying to heighten, so it's not symphonic form or song form, but a lot of film music has a strong sense of melody. It's either really strong in melody, or really strong in texture, and a lot of the music I was into was really strong on mood and texture. It was all the music you didn't remember hearing later, but made the murder scene more scary, or the

Taken from Maximum Rock'n'Roll



love scene more passionate. So maybe it makes me…Well lately it makes me think about, though I don't know if it's exactly right but I presume, that its influence makes me think more about texture. I love playing the electric guitar, but I don't feel like much of a guitarist. I feel like it's just a matter of convenience because it's the most familiar instrument, so when I go to do a song, it's the most immediate way of hashing through it and getting parts on the table. Lately, I'm much more interested in making a guitar not sound like a guitar. I'm hoping that it's going to be less of a rocky rock band.

Not unlike Joe Strummer being very influenced by *Apocalypse Now* and making records that have Third World texture and grooves, like the second half of *Combat Rock*, when he seems to have an almost cinematic approach.

You know, I never got that impression. I just thought it was a big melting pot of influences, like listening to old Motown records.

But like you are listening to dancehall music, the Clash were listening to reggae and early hip hop.

That's one of the things that makes the Clash such a great band. Now, there's bands like Dismemberment Plan that I think does that brilliantly. I think they're the best melting pot.

Mixing different types of media?

Like they love so much contemporary r&b and hip hop and they steal from it in ways that never seem that they are doing a bullshit thing like, this is a rock band doing a hip hop groove. They just incorporate it. They just feed on it, and the things that come out are Dismemberment Plan songs. But I don't know if my interest in films really bears that much relation to our vision of our band.

You once said that "I don't know what mainstream is," but that Britney Spears is Pat Boone-ish, though with a layer of pornography on top.

It's giving people what they want. It's the pretense of innocence.

You've also said that people are speaking the same language. Does that mean it has been corporatized?

It's hard to make a simple analysis like that, like to say that whatever was underground has been bought up by the corporate culture machine. Yet, you can say that because it's definitely true…

We are seeing Violent Femmes and Iggy Pop songs used as advertising on nighttime TV.

Well, homogeneity happens.

So what should make punk any different?

Yeah. I think it's much more interesting and scary, and unfathomable and compelling to me, the way that the language, pace, and attitude of advertising has taken over human interaction in ways that I feel that a lot of times that instead of people talking to each other they are pitching to each other. The way we collectively discuss our existence in the West is mostly through television. The way we know about each other is from watching TV, so somebody in Kansas knows about NYC because they watch TV. That's a stupid simplification, but the language, the editing and sound, the visual media is so complicated, and there's many layers of meaning that are in it that aren't even intended in advertising. And people don't even think about the extra layers of meaning necessarily in what they're creating, they just think about pitching the product. But they pitch it in this incredible evolved, hyper language that people just receive. So I think there is a lot of the information that we can't process directly and I think it's reasonable to sort of speculate that we act on it and it changes the way that we behave.

J.G. Ballard pursued such ideas a lot in the 1970s, suggesting that we are being shaped by forces that we are mostly unaware of, like how the lingo used at the office and newspeak shapes our identity.

You know that I love J.G. Ballard. It makes sense to me. It's a language that millions, if not billions, of people are trapped in the flow of. A language that has meanings that can't all be really accounted for, like whether Tommy Hilfiger logos mean something beyond the fact that he makes clothes. Because it all means something about status in a certain community, and the fact that it was made by sweatshop laborers half way around the world…There's stacks and stacks of meanings.

All interconnected.

How are people not shaped by language, because how else do we communicate?

Well, our language is mediated by forces that we don't necessarily control, so even people who are deep into hip hop or punk don't understand that they are mechanisms of a larger force.

And that's what is so bizarre to me. I don't blame anybody for tuning out completely, because there is no way in which you are not a target market. It's such a true statement to me, that I don't really blame anybody for tuning out of the whole idea, for just not wanting to address it. I just read a book about monochondrial DNA as a way of tracing maternal genealogy. It was written by this guy who does genetic research at Oxford and he was able to basically…Well he did all this research and came up with the assertion that almost everybody of Western European descent can ultimately trace their maternal genealogy to seven different women who lived in the beginning and end of the first ice age. It's an amazing book. But he just drops this bomb at the end of the book, just mentions it in passing, that he was at a conference with these chemical companies who are talking about patenting DNA, because it's just a chemical like any other. And if they did the research, and discovered a certain strand of DNA, then it's intellectual property.

So we can all be owned by somebody!

And you and I can talk about how insane that is, and so many people that I know will agree that it's completely insane. Of course it's insane, you don't even have to think about it. But then there's someone else who's got shit loads of money, corporate sponsorship and a legal team who is just looking at the profit motive, and are going yeah, we can totally own that DNA. That's so insane! But they are like, why shouldn't we? You are interfering with our rights by preventing us from patenting this DNA. It's completely out of control.

But it seems like, at times, in Jawbox's lyrics you were opting out of that language, and creating lyrics that resembled French playwright Artaud, or French Surrealist and Dadaist poets.

That rules *(laughs)*! That makes me really happy, but I am also flip flopping back and

forth between things all the time, and I really don't want to crawl up my own ass and be an artist that makes stuff that doesn't make sense to anybody just to be capricious. There are times that I am literally dying about my inability to write a straightforward song. That's what I am dying to hear. Because when I hear a simple song, now here's an example of advertising, when I hear a simple song that I can trust, I want to cling to it and kiss it, and say thank you, thank you, never leave me. It's like a tonic, knowing that someone has a simple desire to communicate, especially about the insanity of this world, of the circumstances we are in. I think it's really precious and really amazing. That's why in my mind there's times when I sit down to write lyrics and I am almost desperate to say something simple, and then I despair because I just can't because I feel like am cheating. But that's psychobabble. I'm letting it all hang out! The alternative is that it feels like running advertising copy to write a simple song.

Like rock writing. When I write a preview, I'm the PR person creating a spiel.

We just toured with Shiner in the Midwest, I think they are so awesome. The things that people wrote about them was so funny, because they kept getting tagged as heavy emo. *(both laugh)* But I thought about it, like what would I say? Come to the fucking show. Because that's all I feel comfortable saying about bands that I really love. Like the Dismemberment Plan. What are they? What kind of music is that? It's great fucking music. Come to the show. Any time I can say, those guys, yeah, they're emo, it's just a dismissal. Even though there's amazing hip hop music being made, if I say hip hop, chances are I'm talking about something I don't like. If I'm talking about something I like, I'll say Public Enemy, or Kool Keith.

Somebody wrote that you were "an abrasive Neil Diamond, Tony Bennett type crooner, with Andrew Lloyd Web melodiousness."

(both laugh). That's so harsh. I'm really asking for it, but I don't care. We got to let Andrew Lloyd Webber off the hook for *Jesus Christ Superstar*. It's great. You can even fight me about it. It's good.

But "Cats" negates it! But is that quote the kind of trap we fall into when we don't want to describe it as emo?

I don't know. That sounds like character assassination to me!

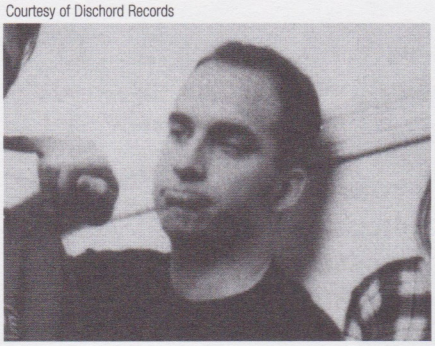
I think he meant it in the best of ways.

You're in a trap if you want to write about music. I fully acknowledge that.

Could you see yourself as Andy Partridge, who still makes great, challenging records, but does not tour anymore?

I would love to see myself putting out the last two XTC records. I only want to tour as long as it is fun to tour, and it continues to be fun. Like I said, I really love working in the studio. It's a lot deeper satisfaction than playing a show. Shows are really fun too, but like anything, watching something mature over a period, and being a facilitator for somebody's creativity is really rewarding.

Courtesy of Dischord Records



Even though there's amazing hip hop music being made, if I say hip hop, chances are I'm talking about something I don't like. If I'm talking about something I like, I'll say Public Enemy or Kool Keith.

Is it just about twisting knobs, or about helping a band like Kerosene 454 make something fresh and challenging to them?

It is about twisting the knobs sometimes. That's one of the things that is great about it, it's a multi-level kind of enjoyment. There's many times I found great satisfaction by just finding the right application for a piece of gear to record a band that really had their shit together, and you don't have to say anything to them except, "did you tune?" Then there's other times when there's the satisfaction of having the right idea that no one else thought of that turned out to be the right thing. That's a great ego boost, and also wonderful because it helps get the job done. I can see just doing that and making music, maybe at the point where my back gives out or something. I don't foresee it in the near future, for this year we've been touring most of the year. We went to Europe and Japan and the U.S. As amazing as it was, especially in Japan, if we have experiences like that than there's no reason to stop touring. I will sleep on someone's floor in Brazil, no problem! In general, our tours are with bands made up of people we really like that most of the time we already know, or we get to know them better and like them more, so it's like a fun scene. It's sometimes frustrating, but also a great way to get around.

But when do you know, as you said when Zach left Jawbox, that you are beating a dead horse?

I don't know. That's a terrible question. I have no idea, presumably you will know, it will occur to you. There's definitely been times when this band has been on tour this past year and a half where I felt that in terms of the fact that we're not in our twenties anymore, and we are not readily identifiable with any particular sub-genre rock music. We're certainly not a hardcore band, we're not an emo band, whatever that is, we're not alt country. We're sort of just this weird inbred mutant rock music that is kind of unhypeable because we're not cute, and we don't have a schtick to dazzle people with. We just have these songs and our particular concept of doing something special and personal. So in that regard, we're not a bandwagon band, we just go out and play. There's been times when we've felt it would be easy to feel left behind in the underground music world, whatever that is. But then I think that, shit, we're in Japan. We're playing our songs there and playing with a Japanese band who we love and are our friends because we toured Japan before. Everybody knew our songs, and it was a blast. Those kinds of things have to happen, but ultimately it has to be satisfying in and of itself just to get up and play. At the point at which it's not, at the point that it is a headache to do, I think it's the point that we've over-stayed our welcome. You can't really have anything to do with second-guessing others' opinion of what you do, because that's a terrible waste of energy. Making music is not a matter of choice, if it were a matter of choice it would just be a silly hobby.

If music, at its core, is emotional, as you've said, would taking away music be like losing your emotions?

It would just be sad, because I don't think you can boil music down to one thing, but it is a really great language for saying things that can't be expressed in words in a linear way. It's an unbeatable language for going into unspoken territory, and a great tool for reflection and self-analysis too.



TALKIN' TRASH

WITH JOHN AND RON FROM EASY ACTION

John Brannon is cantankerous, but has a side that reveals a crush on Cheap Trick's first album, a well-placed affection for a new girlfriend ("I got a call at 9:30 in the morning. She checks up on me when I play other towns…She belted me before I left because she was trying to sort through my contracts and I got frustrated and told her, I don't care, I'm just an old punk, and I'm not going to listen to some girl…Pow!"), and a hearty appetite for Dennys. The local dealers might call him "White Dog," but he's no sucker anymore. A stint in jail made him stop dope cold turkey, like 1,012 rockers before him. "I know that some people think of me as a drug addict, but I don't fuck with it anymore." He's in the same neighborhood, a tough and rundown patch of old Detroit, has a cat (like everyone in the band), and just turned down an offer to front the newly reformed Samhain. He's a no bullshit guy, and even though the Laughing Hyenas took twelve years out of him, and Negative Approach introduced midwestern hardcore to the big wide world, he's not ready to lay down and snore. He's got Easy Action, a brash, teeth-grinding, rebel yell of Motor City mayhem that makes the White Stripes look like kindergarten teachers. Welcome back John Brannon (and Ron from the Necros). Cannons, open fire…

So you've said that at age ten you were listening to Alice Cooper's Killer and by 11 you had the Stooges' albums. How did a ten-year-old get copies of Alice Cooper records?

John: We lived in Detroit, and I hung out with these dudes and we'd get into the big brothers' records. You go over to your friend's house and play pool and flip through their brother's shit. Of course, they'd kill you if they saw you doing it. You'd see these rockers and say, this shit looks cool. All that shit was local bands and you'd hear about them.

So were people like Rob Tyner hanging around?

Ron: Rob Tyner actually hung out a lot in Royal Oaks in Detroit until he died. I mean he was anywhere and everywhere. We used to play shows with Vertical Pillows, and he'd show up. He was there all the time. We used to do "Kick Out the Jams" with him.

John: Even as a little kid we read fucking Cream magazine and all those bands were local, it's not like I was going to see Alice when I was ten, but you'd hear shit about them all the time. They'd play high schools, play roller rinks and stuff. You'd always hear about the shit.

Ron: Rob Tyner was a real social guy, actually. He hung out, and he liked hanging out with people. He wasn't introverted like Fred Sonic Smith.

John: The Stooges and Cooper would always hang out too. You'd hang

out with dudes' older brothers who are a little older, like 14, and they'd be like, dude, I hung out with the Stooges and they gave me some ludes. You'd hear that shit all the time. Or some chick ten years down the line would be like, yeah, when I was 14 I got Iggy's phone number and he came over and fucked me. It was like local shit.

People consider Alice Cooper kind of a joke now, but he was one of the highest grossing touring acts of his day.

John: Anything with the original band is great. It just went on to be whatever. They don't see it as anything cool because when they think back to Cooper they think of "Poison," because that was an MTV video. They don't know about *Love It to Death* and *Killer*. It means nothing to kids today, I mean that's why Marilyn Manson is so big.

Were those the first shows you went to, or did you start with the small punk shows with bands like the Necros?

John: Well, we were hanging with those dudes. The first gigs I started going to was when I was 15 or 16, like Kiss, Aerosmith, and Ted Nugent, the big mid-1970s arena bands.

Ian MacKaye has described seeing Ted Nugent as really intense, because he was so animalistic and naked emotionally, and guys would throw firecrackers at him as he played and he wouldn't even be fazed.

John: Well, when you're a 15 year old burnout from Detroit you are going to be exposed to Nugent and Aerosmith. A lot of bands used to tour Detroit at that point, and everybody went to the shows.

What was Detroit like for your generation, which came about ten years after the Stooges?

John: Well, we started going to the big arena gigs like in 8th grade, Alice Cooper shows, early Iggy Pop shows. We were too young to have seen the Stooges, but we did see the early Iggy shows. Detroit was always crazy. It seemed like bands used to love to play there all the time. There would be this crazy fucking energy.

But smaller shows would happen at places like the Freezer Theatre?

John: Yeah, that's two blocks from my house. That's down the Cass corridor, down in the ghetto. That's my neighborhood now. You want to cop dope or get a hooker it takes you about thirty seconds.

Ron: They got rid of all the burnt out cars, but it's still not...

John: It's straight up ghetto, it's fucked up.

You moved away at one point because all your equipment was stolen so many times.

John: We moved to Ann Arbor.

So why would you go back to a neighborhood like that?

John: You can't stay away from home for too long. The whole thing is that Detroit was kind of dead at that point, and we wanted to get out of Detroit, and we did the Laughing Hyenas, and we lived out in Ann Arbor. But right when we moved to Ann Arbor they started opening all these cool clubs down in the corridor. So we were going down to play all these clubs, so we said, fuck it, and moved back to Detroit. Within a mile radius, there were like five clubs down there...Alvins, the Gold Dollar, Magic Stick and all this shit.

Ron: There was like the Freezer, and the original Clutch Cargo. Different scales, you know? Fear would be playing Clutch Cargo, the Misfits at the Freezer Theatre the next weekend, and shit like that.

But is it true that you had a ton of equipment in a room, and a guy tied a rope to the door and drove his car away and yanked it off?

John: That happened twice until I got smart enough and thought, maybe we should get out of town for awhile.

How did you end up hooking up with the guys from Maumee, OH, and Lansing, MI, like Tesco Vee and those guys?

John: I think I first met those dudes at like a Clash gig. David Johansen and the Clash... I'd see them at Devo gigs.

Ron: They were handing out copies of their fanzine. "Hey man, look, I just xeroxed it!"

John: I had this other band at this point called Static. We started hanging out with those kids, and they turned me on to a lot of stuff, like all the magazines...

Ron: Black Flag.

John: Yeah, and the Germs and the Weirdos. I was just hanging out with them and I put Negative Approach together. Actually, Ron was in the Necros after Cory left.

Ron: They were like, you're not in a band. Well, you are, but you'll leave, right?

John: It was kind of like we'd always run into them at record stores, and we'd be like, who's this dude buying the Angelic Upstarts 45?

Ron: That red headed guy.

John: Right *(laughs)*. We crossed path and shit.

Your first Negative Approach gig was with the Necros in somebody's basement?

John: That was in Todd's basement.

Mostly friends and just weird guys who came in off the street?

John: That was in the days when it was just a bunch of drunk Maumee kids...You know, Negative Approach dragged some people down there. Were you at that show?

Ron: He didn't even know me or like me back then, so I was like fuck that.

John: Todd's parents were gone for the whole weekend. We had a good, solid ten minute set for that day and age. And they trashed his house. It was like thirty dudes and two chicks.

You once called hardcore the soul of the suburb, then as it got watered down, you called it generic, but why in 1982/3 did it seem like the right music?

John: Everybody was just so fried on the Detroit scene, on all the leftover 1970s rock bands, and all the new wave bands coming up. It was so dull in Detroit, there was nothing that was kicking your ass anymore. The big things was like the Romantics, and the real pop retro shit, and all of a sudden, there was all these kids showing up to these shows. It was like a phenomenon in Detroit. Skater kids...It seemed at that point that all the kids hanging out were forming bands.

The Necros were putting out records and going on tour. It was a kid phenomenon at that point, and was just exciting. Instead of trying to sneak in a bar to see some fucked up old new wave band...Well, we were kids back then, playing music for ourselves, which had nothing to do with the jaded fucking Detroit scene.

Kids setting up their own shows, putting out their own records.

John: Yeah, yeah. It was all underground. These fifteen year old kids wanted a place to hang out, so we did hall gigs, and the Freezer Theatre was all ages, so we just bypassed the whole bar thing and said fuck it. It was exciting. There were people putting out records, there was Touch and Go magazine, a lot of fanzines out, kids putting out records. It was cool.

The first Negative Approach record was



Courtesy of Sold Out fanzine

remixed like four different times and when it was pressed the hole was in the wrong place?

John: That was when Touch and Go was first starting out and were trying out pressing plants and stuff. It was kind of new then. We recorded that with Corey from Touch and Go in his basement with a 4-track. The whole record process thing was kind of new at that point. We didn't know what the hell we were doing.

There was just a small amount of time between Negative Approach and Laughing Hyenas?

John: There was about a year between them.

Larissa actually started by playing bass in the band?

John: Yeah, we actually jammed with this one dude on guitar. It was Ricky Screech, who was in a band with two of the guys in Easy Action. He was just all about the Johnny Thunders trip…

Ron: He had all those licks down.

John: He could do all that shit. But I was like, this is not what I fucking want to do. Larissa was like, fuck it, I'll just play guitar. The dude Kevin, who had never played guitar, started playing bass. We took it from there. I was like, fuck it, let's start from scratch. It's better to start with people who want to do it, rather than with people who are totally affected and trying to cop some kind of style. I didn't want to do the Negative Approach thing, I had already done that. We all got together and liked similar music, so it was better to have people that could learn with the band than with people who were already doing the Johnny Thunder school licks.

With *Merry Go Round*, you recorded some demos and sent them to fanzines, which started the hype. Can you imagine doing the same thing today?

John: It was a whole different thing. Wait, this is my jam ("Here Comes the Warm Jets" begins playing). I just got this on CD. I love this album.

Ron: Speaking of which, you got my other CD. I want that back, dude. I've been listening to scratchy vinyl.

But even with Easy Action's two singles behind you and an album, is it difficult to create the same kind of hype?

John: That's a whole different scene dude. You know how it is today with MTV and shit. I don't know, we just try and do it like how we do it. Like we're trying to get the records out there, and getting out to play the shows, and hopefully it picks up. We have some kind of advantage because people might be familiar with what we've done. We're not trying to live off that or anything, but it helps to a point. We don't have money to make a fucking video and all that shit.

You've always said you're not providing entertainment for anybody, but what have you been doing for twenty years then?

John: We're doing it for ourselves.

Ron: For the fun of it. I'm actually enjoying it now.

John: We're doing it for ourselves. We just dig travelling and playing shows. It's what we do, and it's what we know.

Here's a quote from you. "Who wants to sing about happiness, love, and having a good time, because that's not the way it is."

John: That's pretty much my general theme. When you are happy and getting laid and shit, you're not thinking about writing a jam. When you're fucking down and dirty and strung out, and you hate your girlfriend, that's when I pick up a pen.

Ron: That's when life is most inspiring *(laughs)*. The damn thing sucks, so you start writing these nasty things so people know what you are thinking.

You've also said that a band shouldn't judge an audience, but is that difficult after twenty years?

Ron: You never know what's going to happen until you play.

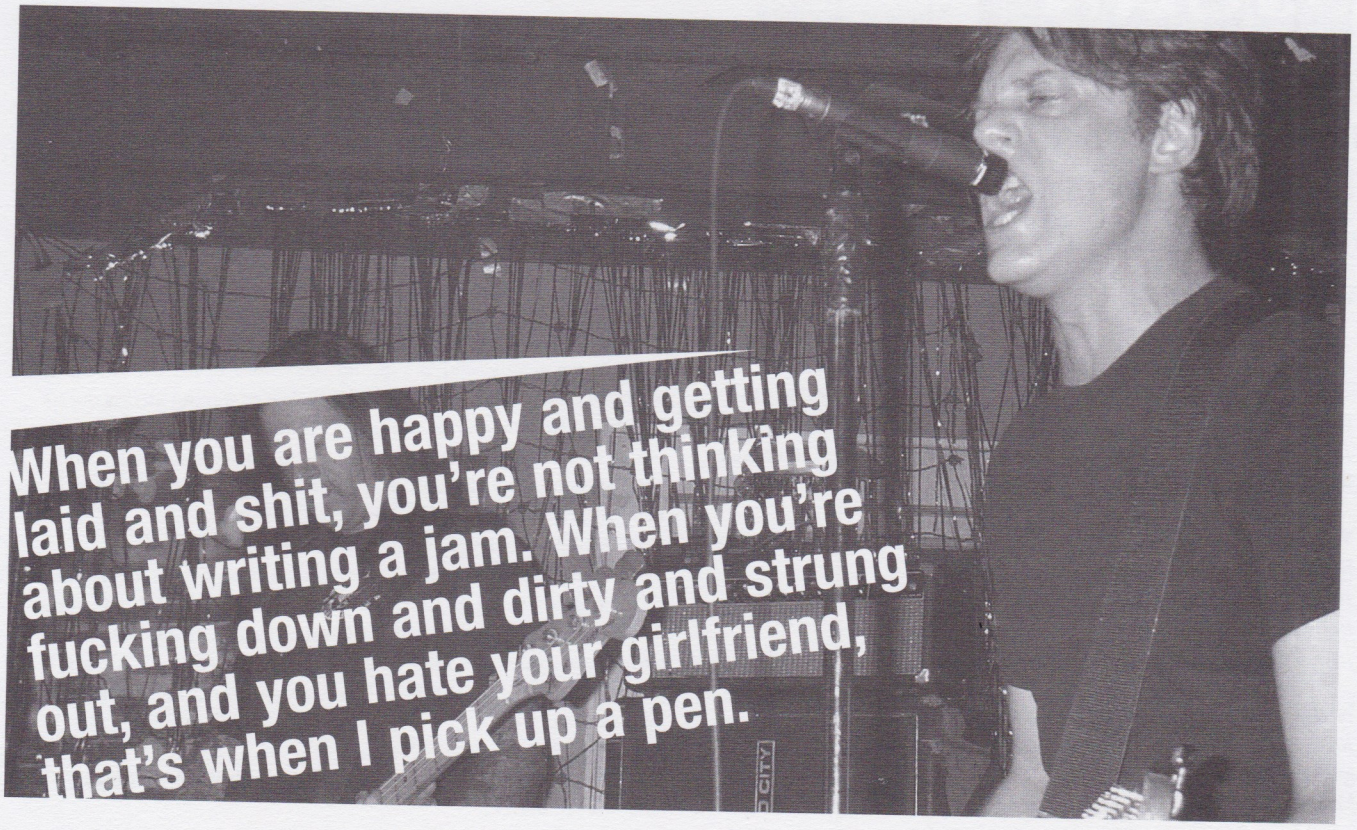
John: Ah man, we walk in, and we're like, we can jam here.

There's no preconceived…

John: You can't have that man.

Ron: You can't plan it. They might stand there and stare, or whatever. It just happens.

John: We know we are going to jam, and do what we do. Whatever they take from it, cool. You can't do that shit. I would hate that when bands would be pissed off when people don't react, like "People dance!" or "Come up to the



Courtesy of Maximum Rock'n'Roll



It was like, what's going to happen next? Are we going to live through this one? It was rough times, but we liked it. We kept doing it.

front!" I mean that's like rock'n'roll bullshit.
Ron: If there's somebody there to watch you, that's the main part of the bargain.
John: We got our shit up these fucking stairs (points). No roadies after twenty years, so we're here to do it. That's what we do.

"Rock'n'roll should never mix with politics, because it's makes assholes try to look intelligent," you said. But you come from the home of the MC5.
John: But that was their trip, and then, that wasn't even their trip as much as John Sinclair's thing. It was a different time.

Or did that prove your point?
John: No. It's not for us. That's not what I want to sing about.
Ron: Music can be used for many things.
John: It's like you write a song that happens in the time, and two years later it is so out of place and means nothing. And you're still stuck with this song where you're rapping about Reagan or something.
Ron: It's like in the Necros. We were like, we're going to do "Police Brutality" again? Or how about "Hate My School." I mean we already graduated seven years ago…
John: I've been out of high school for seven years, but I still hate my school *(laughs!)*

You have to switch out presidents in the songs every new election.
John: That shit's now real to me. If you are going do it, then you have to feel it, and I'm not about that. That's not where I am at.

Years ago Larissa said, 'If I didn't have a band, I'd be in jail," which holds true for many old school punks it seems.
John: It kept us going, and kept us out of trouble sometimes.
Ron: Got us into a lot of trouble sometimes too.
John: I'm still here.

What is it about a band that lets you channel those energies?
John: You get out a lot of frustrations. If you're just sitting around, getting high, and watching TV or something, you get frustrated. At least you get to do something creative, and get your aggressions out. Doing a gig always feels good. I don't know what we'd be doing. Punching the walls or something. Being assholes. At least we got to do something we dig, and still dig.

There was one Hyenas gig in a German cow pasture that was filmed for German TV?
John: That's just those gigs in Germany. You pull up and there's a cornfield, and you're like, okay. I don't know. It was just a huge ass show. You saw that on TV?

No, I read about it.
John: That was a great gig. There's a bootleg. I don't know if you have the CD of *Merry Go Round*, but there's a live version of "Dedication" that is taken from it. That's the simulcast from it. I never saw the footage, but I heard the tapes.

Can you name one or two other shows that were equally as weird?
John: I don't know if my memory is so good. Ron, can you?
Ron: The time we played at the Ritz. We were opening for the Fluid.
John: Rage Against the Machine opened for us, and we were like, who are these kids? A couple of months later we were like, oh, okay. That was an odd gig. There's so much weird shit, I don't know. I don't keep track dude. I don't do drugs anymore, so I'm just happy to remember what I've done for the last twenty years.

Was it true that when the Hyenas were looking for a drummer, Jim Kimball came around, and you were like, play Miles Davis' "So What," and he actually did.
John: Yeah, well he was in jazz band or whatever.
(Suddenly a skinny girl with long hair slinks over)
Girl: John? I grew up in Ann Arbor. And I did cocaine with you when I was sixteen.
(Everybody roars with laughter).
John: Hey, I remember you. Ah, fuck.. God.

So, it wasn't just made up?
John: What was? That I did cocaine with her when she was 16?

No, the Kimball story.
John: Yeah, it blew us away, He played a lot of styles. He was a great fucking drummer. He could do a lot of shit. That was a guy who needed to jam to get shit out. But he was a great player.
Ron: He was a monster, in other words. He started off nice and quiet, and then he became a guy who wouldn't play quiet anymore.

There was a gig at CBGBs where he took on two guys outside the club.
John: (reluctant) Ah, that's an old story. Well we went to New York, and the three of us had bad habits, so we gave him all our money to hold on to, so we wouldn't spend it all. He went out to buy some pizza or something, and he's got all the money in his wallet, which is a couple of week's worth of gig money. We're staying at this dude's house and we thought he was going to stash the money, but he went out to cop some pizza or something, he opened up his wallet, and some guy mugged him and shit. I don't know…He got stabbed in the head and hand and shit. He got ripped and stuff.
Ron: But he still played the show that night.
John: It was kind of weird, He taped up his hand with duct tape and shit, and put a thing on his head. He was a trooper. It was one of the fucked up things that happened with the Hyenas. It was the Life of Crime tour, and it was like, what's going to happen next? Are we going to live through this one? It was rough times, but we liked it. We kept doing it.

And it was amicable when he split along with the bass player?
John: No. It wasn't.

Ron: That wasn't a good thing.
John: They kind of just like…Actually, we heard they were going to split, and me and Larissa were just like, fuck it, we just packed up our shit and said fuck it, and they hooked up with that other dude.

P.W. Long.
John: It was at the point when we were writing songs for the new record and it wasn't right. I wrote "Crawl" and I showed them that, and they were like, I don't want to do this shit. Larissa and I were like, whatever, so they kind of went their way, and we went our way.

And the drummer from the Necros joined…
John: Actually, two of the Necros, Todd and Ron started playing with us then. We did *Hard Times*.
Ron: It was all down hill from that point.

When asked whether you were your own favorite band, you described yourself as the "toe on the totem pole."
John: I don't sit home and listen to my records. I don't sit around and think, I'm so great or anything.

So it's about humility in terms of your own music?
John: I don't know. I don't even listen to it, dude.
Ron: You've played it so many times, you can't listen to it.
John: I don't think any of us sit around and listen to our records. There's so much more out there that we like. It's weird, I don't know. I'm not so much about checking ourselves out as must as checking other shit out.

The Hyenas covered "Life of Crime" by the Weirdos, and Easy Action covers "Solitary Confinement" by the Weirdos, which some people might think is a little strange because they assume the Weirdos were just a LA art punk band.
John: I didn't think that. I heard those early singles and that shit blew me away. Actually, the Necros, like Barry and Todd, turned me on to that shit. And that was before I heard Black Flag, Minor Threat, or any of that shit. So that was heavy to me, I dug that shit.

So what does John listen to when he's home?
John: Shit, I don't know. They just played that Eno song, "Here Comes the Warm Jets." I listen to all kinds of shit, dude.

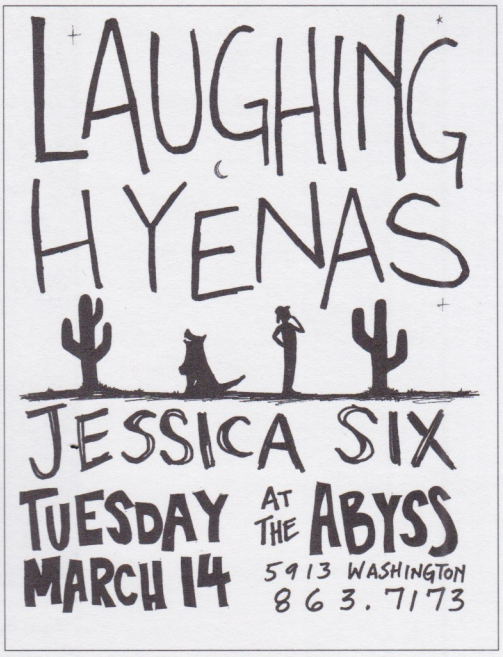
People describe your voice as resembling delta blues singers…
John: I used to listen to a lot of that, but not so much anymore. I could always play John Lee Hooker, or Howlin' Wolf and all that shit. When the Hyenas started out, I was really fed up with punk rock, and I really started to go out and buy blues records and digging all that shit, but I got so many different kinds of stuff that I listen to. I can listen to pretty much anything. Nothing too much new.

Is Easy Action able to incorporate all those different things you listen to?
John: We're all kind of the same age, we're all older people playing music, so our roots go back a little further, like the 1970s, the glam shit, the hardcore shit, and the rock thing. We got a lot to go back and draw on, instead of some band coming out and saying I got into music when the second Korn record came out. A guy was quoting this kid from a new band the other day who was saying, "I really like old Aerosmith, like "Rag Doll" and stuff," and I'm thinking, they had a few records before that. Today, I don't know how far their influence goes back, or what they draw from, maybe they go back as far as Nirvana, if even that. It's just the clone Nirvana bands. It's just rehashed shit. I can't listen to any of it. Radio sucks. There were some like key bands, and every other band on the radio is trying to rehash that sound. It's like everything is a carbon copy, so with us, we've been playing so long and been into so many kinds of music, that we just try and put it all in a melting pot.

And has playing music for you changed since you've cleaned up and stopped using drugs?
John: Yeah, yeah. I mean I could jam when I was on drugs.

There's no doubt about that.
John: But I'm having a better time. On tour I don't have to worry about all the bullshit, like trying to find drugs, or wasting all my money. I'm living like a dog. I'm poor. But I don't have to worry about all the bullshit that went with that whole lifestyle. I'm happy, I'm all right. I'm still doing it. I'm amazed that I am still doing it. But what else is there to do?

People like Lee Renaldo and Thurston Moore from Sonic Youth were big Hyenas fans. Have you stayed in contact?
John: Not really. I haven't seen them in a long time. They helped us out when we were starting out. They took us under their wing. They let us open for a couple of tours, so they really exposed us to a lot of people by being able to play with them, so they really helped us. I haven't talked to any of those people in awhile. Now that we are going on the road and playing out of town shows with Easy Action I run into people, and it's always cool, and like hey what's up.



So we can look forward to more touring?
John: Oh yeah. We did an East Coast tour a few months ago. This Texas thing just shot up, so we came out here to do this. Right now we're writing new tunes because we want to get a new record out. Reptilian is putting out a Dead Boys tribute album and we did a track for that, "I Need Lunch." It came out pretty good. I think next month we're going to go in the studio and do another 45 to get something out, a few songs. But we need to finish up the songs for another album. With even the Hyenas, we always had so much time between the records, and I don't want it to be like that. I don't want people to be waiting for three years for the next thing to pop out, so I just want to keep shit coming out all the time and go out and play shows.

Not only for the buyers, but to keep you invested in the band?
John: Oh yeah. It keeps us busy. It's always cool to get out of Detroit. I mean, I love Detroit, but it's always cool to get out of the ghetto.

But people might say, why be poor in Detroit when you could be poor in warm Texas?
John: Rock'n'roll isn't paying the bills these days. I got a part time job, but I am not making enough money to move anywhere else. Plus, I don't know, it's seedy, and I like it. I can't say that I don't. I can trust myself to stay out of trouble, so I don't have to fuck with all the elements. I can stick to myself, and do what I have to do. It's all right.



Courtesy of Columbia Records

"Just me and Mike Watt playing guitar," said D. Boon at the tail end of the Minutemen album *Double Nickels on the Dime*, which was lined with drawings by Raymond Pettibon, close-ups of all three San Pedro working class heroes in their used cars, and photos of them playing cramped clubs and outdoor parks. D. Boon half-sang the lyric, as if he were talking to a beer glass or an empty telephone booth. He loved Richard Meltzer, John Doe, E. Bloom, Joe Strummer, Richard Hell, and Mike Watt…When I brought my copy of the *Tour Spiel* 7" to the Appletree Records counter in the mid-1980s, where I later worked and guys would cut out and paste pictures of dorks with goatees and insert the caption "Hymie," meaning me, in permanent marker, the guy with the unruly, oily Beatles hair cut said, "I just heard that D. Boon died yesterday." I bought the record and I went home with hunkered down shoulders and the feeling of styrofoam in my legs. The show Cutting Edge, hosted on MTV by deadpan and quirky Peter Zaremba of the Fleshtones, dedicated their next show to him. They had aired the "Ack Ack Ack" video earlier that year, and about the same time MTV used to run a clip of the "This Ain't No Picnic" video. The Cutting Edge also ran footage of a UCLA show interspersed with interviews that took place on some skinny steps outdoors surrounded by trees. D. Boon said, "There should be a band on every block" and scratched his thick beard. I had a Ludwig jazz kit at the time that I bought from a guy who lived on a dairy farm in Wisconsin. With gusto and floppy wrists, I barely mastered the heavy metronome chops of "1969" by the Stooges and the single version of "In A Godda Da Vida" by Iron Butterfly, but hearing those words cemented the whole idea that I was a band guy. I gave up on second guessing the whole thing, and have been in bands right up to now. You see, D. Boon was an archangel of sorts. Mike Watt is his bass player.

MIKE WATT

You just stayed at Ian MacKaye's house?
Yeah, he's a nice guy. A no bullshit guy. If he says something, he does it. There's no career hustle, and I like people like that. Other than the bands like the Clash or something. They've sold hundreds of thousands of records out of his house, and never had any major label hustle. I'm very inspired by that. I try to run things down to earth too.

But what is it like to be hanging with him twenty years later?
Well, bro, he's come to all my shows. I was just at his house. I hadn't been there for about two years. But he comes to all my D.C. shows, like Henry, or a lot of those guys.

Let's talk about D. Boon. His daddy was a big Buck Owens fan?
That was all his daddy would listen to. D. Boon knew nothing of Cream, The Who, and others. Creedence Clearwater was the only band he heard that was kind of rock'n'roll. So we learned all those songs, and that's why I wear plaid. We were only 13. Our first gig we went to was T. Rex when we were 14 when they came through. His dad was cool, that was just where they were from in terms of music, but it wasn't like he was close-minded, it was just that he wasn't exposed. It wasn't like his dad was a big T. Rex fan, but he wasn't afraid to take his kid to see them. He loved country, and that was what he came from. I remember when we took some of his dad's records and put firecrackers in the holes and threw them all over the place. The John Fogerty influence is very heavy. The other guy who influenced him on guitar was Donald Roeser, who played lead guitar for Blue Oyster Cult.



The first song you taught him was "Red and Black"?
You got to remember he was the guitarist. He played much better than I did. His mother encouraged us to be in a band because they lived in the projects and it was a way for us to stay in the house so she could keep an eye on us. It was a kind of childcare, you know. She had a big influence on us. She died when we graduated from high school. It was a very traumatic experience for us. First time we had to deal with death. That's why I wrote *The Engine Room.* I lost D. Boon when I was 27, and I lost my father when I was 35.

You almost lost yourself recently.
That was very hard. That's what the next record is about.

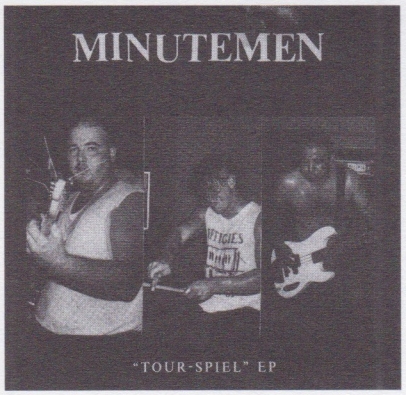
But like Keith Morris from the Circle Jerks, in the end you seem to be rejuvenated. You did play with J. Mascis and the Fog and Pairs of Pliers.
One day in-between those two. I've been touring non-stop.

You spent five months in bed.
The surgery kept me in the hospital for a week and a half. You know where the perineum is? It's between your legs.

They thought it was a fungus, but it was really an abscess?
They didn't know what the fuck it was. They were just keeping me on antibiotics. I think they thought it was a VD, because of the antibiotics they gave me. The test came out negative, but they had the idea fixed in their mind. The shit they gave actually helped spread it around my colon, and it got so big it exploded. I had 38 days of straight fever. I was dying. I can't tell you what 38 days of fever is like. But they were young doctors, young men out of medical school, LA County Hospital, of course, full of poor people and the indigent. The next record is about my sickness. It's my version of Dante's Divine Comedy where Hell's the sickness, and purgatory is the healing where I play my bass and ride my bicycle.

How many circles does your hell have (Dante had 11)?
Well I tell you, the fever was like the bottom one. It's very strange, the body and mind. Your body is burning up, and every three hours you go into the shakes like a junky. It was insane. I never got any sleep longer than a minute or two for months. It's an incredible experience to go through. I hurt so bad for so long. And then being where it was…I had nightmares, and of course I'm on morphine for the first couple of days of surgery when they cut me open. That's when I went through intense trauma. Then it healed slow. I was much better after that because I had hope. I didn't have hope before they cut me. Before it exploded, they gave me some prescription stuff, but that didn't heal it. The only thing that helped was hot baths.

You ended up with three holes after surgery?
Well, it blew a hole in me, and I went to the



emergency room, and the doctors were shocked. They cut two more holes in me so they could clean all that out. One of them was like a cunt. Another was like my ball sac, but bigger. My balls were swollen up like grapefruit. You can't imagine what that's like. After all that stuff happens you don't know what's happening. You're putting your trust in these guys and they're acting like nothing is wrong. I'm not telling you to hate doctors or anything, because obviously it's the doctors that saved my life. They're not gods. It's a new science. It's only been around for a little over a hundred years. If you've ever seen a Civil War doctor's kit, it's a chisel and a saw. But anyway, I lived, and I'm very grateful. It was traumatic, the sickness and the healing. My sister packing and unpacking me. Like starting a lawn mower, packing me up, loading me up twice a day. I had tubes in me so I could not play bass. They took the tubes and I was pissing out bits of the lining of my bladder, because I had a bladder infection. That shit was like pissing fishhooks. It's insane. You raise your arms and get up on your tiptoes all the way stretched out screaming your brains out, because the acid is really high in your bladder. So I went back and tried to play bass. I had not stopped playing bass since I was teenager. So I started doing Stooges songs.

Because they're fairly easy?
Not a lot of chord changes.

At that time, did you know anything about the Fog project with J. Mascis and Ron Asheton from the Stooges?
He had come to some of my gigs before, and I did a song with him for *Velvet Goldmine.* With him coming on board with Jay, I kind of asked him. We did nine shows. He's very sweet. Up to that time, I grew up with the Stooges, so it was like playing with Marc Bolan or John Fogerty. I'm not really a musician, you know. I got into it because of D. Boon. I graduated high school in 1976, and that's when punk came. It was a lot of circumstance, and a lot of luck. The right place at the right time. And sure, because the opportunity was there, we went for it. It's not

something I took for granted. I have to say, it would be hard to top the time of 1976. There was a lot of chance and luck. There were some very inspiring bands. You could not be scared to be on stage. These guys were really incredible. It's like you're never out of school. You got to get in front of class. You hope everybody likes you, and you think one day you'll grow out of that shit, but you don't. It's what you have to deal with every fucking night. But I don't want to say that things are too tough, what about working in a coal mine with five starving kids? This rock'n'roll stuff is for sissies. They think they are so precious. You should just be grateful for the opportunity, but you just hear them pissing and moaning. But I also have to qualify it by saying that I think I am a born entertainer. Right now, with the Jom and Terry show (Jerry Trebotic and Tom Watson), I'm still curious all these years later, 28 records later. I have it set up so we're all facing each other like at practice. It's the drummer's first tour. He just had a baby. It's quite something to sacrifice that to go out and tour.

You didn't play with that same stage set up with the Minutemen or Firehose?

No. You're right. Ed was very charismatic, very confident, but at first he didn't like looking at me. I asked him about it one time and he said, what, I have to hold your hand? And you know, that was almost the thing that made me say, maybe I'm done with this. Ever since then, I have put the guys around me. I think bands are kind of a young man's things in a way. They are like a little state. You come together and make decisions. Do things together as a team. You try and focus through the music. But it's like getting gray hair, things change. I use a littler bass now because my hands got sore. I can't make the same moves anymore.

You've been using picks again?

That was with Jay. But I do it on a few songs. But yeah, if you don't use it, you lose it. It started with Double Nickels on the Dime. You see, with punk rock I couldn't use my fingers. It was too fast. I picked until I got better and could use my fingers. Again, if you don't use it, you lose it. That's why I say I'm not natural at it, because I'm always working on this shit. I'm practicing all the time in order to do gigs. You got to just keep doing it. I now ride a bicycle. I got a car when I was 16 and stopped riding a bike. But this guy sold me a ten speed for five dollars and I began to ride again. I live in the harbor, you know it's different than L.A. It's 45 minutes away. I wrote the whole opera on that bike. But anyway, I don't want to lose learning how to play the bass.

Why was the tour with Perry Farrell such an impetus for the opera?

You got to understand, Perry doesn't play. It's the first time I've ever played with a guy who doesn't work like a machine. When he teaches you a song, he doesn't show you the chords, the notes, or the riffs, he tells you a story. It's all very interesting, and you know I thought, I should tell my own story. I was on tour with him, but we didn't play that much, three times a week or so, so I had a lot of time on my hands. I went to a used bookstore. D. Boon's favorite movie as a kid was Steven McQueen's *Sea Pebbles*, which came out in 1966, and turned out it was a book written by a sailor named Richard McKenna, 23, who was a chief engineer down below, just like my father. So I get this book, and I read it, and it really inspires me. And then there's this other book that was a favorite of mine from the 1920s that I enjoyed called "Ulysses." It takes places during the span of a day. So I thought I'm going to put the life of my father and the life of my band in one day. Let it be an opera, but with these kinds of songs. I had not written for D. Boon for fourteen or fifteen years, or my father, so I wanted it to have the right kind of sound. You know, I loved them, and I wanted to put it down. I've always written songs for people. Always. So it shouldn't be that hard. They were gone, and I had to deal with that. What's weird about that movie, we loved that movie, but we couldn't tell what it was about. We were just kids, and it was complicated. Took place in 1928, in times of the Chinese Civil War, as such. Military fears, psychological things. In the book, Jake (played by McQueen in the movie) wants to belong to something, but he can't put up with the bullshit. The hypocrisy. This takes place on the Yellow (Yangtze) River, on an old Spanish riverboat that we've got now because we won that earlier war. The crew don't do anything. They got coolies doing it all, like cutting their hair. The only thing they're not allowed to do is use their dishes. The captain's got two sets of books. There's corruption. They got the coolies basically keeping the ship running. Like when the Chinese built the railroad through the Sierras. Incredible job they did. The Chinese, the Irish, and the Germans. Those Chinese came over to build it, then they were kept out of the country.

Courtesy of Kevin Scanlon



I think bands are kind of a young man's things in a way. They are like a little state. You come together and make decisions. Do things together as a team. You try and focus through the music. But it's like getting gray hair, things change.



When I first heard [Jazz], it was groups like Albert Ayler, John Coltrane, and it sounded like punk to me, just from a different time. It was insane. And I couldn't systematize it like all the other music I heard into verse chorus, verse chorus. It sounded free, and reached me in different ways than other music. I was ecstatic.

There's a museum of Chinese-American culture in the West.

Yeah, in Sacramento. They came over and sweated building the railroad, but couldn't even live here because of the Yellow Laws.

The Oriental Exclusions Act.

They couldn't even have children here. It was all just a bunch of shit. So this guy is just a simple man working. He wipes his hand of the whole mess. He doesn't like the way these guys are doing their jobs. He gets one of the Chinese guys, Po-Han, and teaches him. What the others do is called "Monkey See, Monkey Do," where they just copy, because the white guys don't want them to really know knowledge. So he teaches him to use metaphors to talk about things like how steam is used and stuff. A working man wrote it, it's his own book. He wanted to be a writer, so he went and read Hemingway. He retired from the Navy in Chapel Hill, while my dad lived in Fresno, which is nowhere near the ocean, which tells you about the Navy. But the book's all about the military fear, and how it runs. And when they lose it, it all falls apart. I recommend it to anybody. It's not complicated. In a way, it talks about getting cured. Of course, in the movie they simplified it. It was a war movie, but the book is more than that. So there were all these things coming together. Now, I've written things down and call it "Second Man's Middle Stand." because I'm definitely not at the beginning, but I hope I am not at the end. Did you think about being in your 40s as a kid? But this is where I am, and time is a train.

Are you the same age as your dad was when you started putting out records?

Hmm, I was 22. So was my dad in his 40s? Yeah, he was. He died when he was 52. He never understood my vision of the band. Thought it was just a limited thing. As it got towards the end, I was sending him postcards from all the towns, which is also in the opera the *Engine Room*. I think a part of being a piece of the consciousness in the world is the ability to learn. In one way you could say being humble. Remaining engaged and not a shill or a pawn. One guy did this interview with John Coltrane and said, John Coltrane, what are you trying to do here? What are you trying to do with this music?

What period of Coltrane was this?

When he was going on and on, and people couldn't handle it.

Like *Om* or *Interstellar Space*?

No, more like Love Supreme. But to get back to the statement, he said what are you trying to do? Coltrane said, I am trying to uplift people. Well, Sun Ra says you're ripping him off. John Coltrane says, you know, there might be something to that. I listen to a lot of John Gilmore. He says, I think music is a big reservoir. So he's probably the biggest inspiration in my life right now. You know, I didn't grow up with jazz, didn't know anything about it. When I first heard it, it was groups like Albert Ayler, John Coltrane, and it sounded like punk to me, just from a different time. It was insane. And I couldn't systematize it like all the other music I heard into verse chorus, verse chorus. It sounded free, and reached me in different ways than other music. I was ecstatic. Kind of like the state I like to get in when I play, because you're so scared. I try to whip myself into a kind of frenzy, a Dervish kind of thing in a way. I don't let the fear win on me or make me insecure or not let me engage. That's why I think songs are a dialogue, a conversation between instruments. It's not just everybody, like the piano, playing their little part. It's actually them engaging each other in conversation. That's a lot of my style, lexicon, or whatever, on my bass, humility. When people ask me, what kind of bass player are you, I say I am D. Boon's bass player. He made me feel important, so I could grow. He was very generous, very giving. So it helped. I didn't even know what bass was. When we played, gigs were so far away that on stage I couldn't tell the strings from my fingers. I played it like a guitar with four strings. I didn't know anything. You can't believe how music was in the 1970s. You could buy guitars at record stores. We didn't even know that your A note had to be the other guy's A note. We just knew that the notes had to do with tightening the strings. Some guy's liked them loose, but I liked my strings tight. When we played "Down on the Corner" and it sounded right, you were in tune. We didn't know that your "Down On The Corner" had to sound like the other guy's "Down on the Corner." We were twelve, and if punk wouldn't have came, we were ready for it anyway.

In one interview, did you say that you didn't even know that you could play your own songs?

Maybe, maybe you're right. We didn't, we didn't because there was no culture. The '70s was about copying records. There was no clubs. It was arena rock. Nobody wrote their own songs until punk rock happened down in Hollywood.

So you began seeing the Dils…

The Dils, the Germs, X, and the Screamers. They were the first big band, and they didn't even have a guitar. You have to understand, '70s punk was much different, I don't dis the '80s hardcore kids, because they were very important, but because they were at such a young age, and not much musical, everyone was playing the same fucking song. It was different too because of the parents and the suburbia. In Hollywood, there was a lot of glitter and glam. The only kids you saw were like runaways. But a lot of them were artists, so there was a lot of experimentation, like Black Randy, Nervous Gender…

Which Phranc was in.

There was a nine-year-old boy in there too. But we lived down in Pedro, along the harbor. I had never seen any of this stuff before.

The distance between the people on stage and the audience was very small. I got to talk to Darby, to Pat. It was just a different way of doing music. It changed my life forever. It blew my mind. Like "Rocky Horror Movie," we'd all run up there. They all knew the music. They'd throw toast. They took over the movie.

You were at places like the Masque.

Yeah. It was kind of inbred. Bands from outside of it couldn't play, that's why we became friends with Black Flag. Did our own thing. It finally got big. The Orange County kids came and took it over. And we played those gigs with Black Flag. We played very fast. I'm not ashamed of anything. I don't think it was lame or anything, I think it was what it was. It did get a little more narrow. A lot of these cats played that way just because they were young kids, and as they learned more, they started to grow out of punk. You have to understand, for us it was much different, because we had already learned how to play. That's why we had a different sound and punk meant so much to us, because we thought we were tainted, polluted. We didn't want people to think we were rock'n'roll. We hated it, thought it was fascist, and kept things far away. Our parents were working people, so we didn't have swimming pools to take a shit in. We weren't oriented that way towards society or oppressive suburbia. We were more interested in working conditions and who people were voting for, not like rock'n'roll oppression, and people not letting us play clubs. Things in our life were a bit different than in their life, but that didn't mean we were too good to play for them. Now, I don't know what they thought of us, because by that time the scene was full of good-looking young men, like TSOL, at punk shows. And you know, old punk was not full of good-looking people. Whatever, I'm not trying to make judgements or anything, but it had changed.

But those guys were all surfers...

Exactly. Jack Grisham and the guys are still playing, but you could tell that he might not have been the biggest bozo in high school, like me and D. Boon. So I can imagine what they thought seeing us up on stage. But we did it our way, and met other bands like the Meat Puppets and Husker Du, and Saccharine Trust. But we all had our different styles. We thought the thing to do was not copy each other. That was the thing about punk, it was important that you had to somehow come up with your own thing. You had to get your own thumbprint, not rubberstamping a sound or being a cookie cutter.

Jack from TSOL said they hated bands that jumped on other people's sounds.

They went through a lot of hell when they changed, because people didn't want it. But I can't blame these kids, because for a lot of them it was the first time they had ever gone to gigs. It wasn't like us to appeal to those kids. It doesn't mean we were better, just different. It's not like today, where for ten-year-olds it's a regular part of growing up. In those days, if you were an Orange County punk you took a lot of shit. They had mug shots of kids. It was ridiculous. Because of their haircuts, like what the fuck? So I always had a place in my heart for those guys. They did get together as mobs sometimes and acted like idiots, but by themselves these guys were getting the shit kicked out of them.

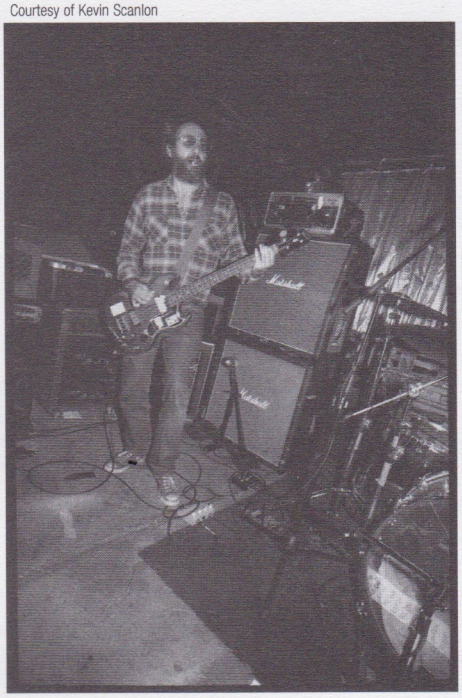
Are you speaking of the Starwood?

Well, not that much, But they would beat up people for having long hair. I'm not talking about that so much as one on one. To be different those kids had to go through hell, so my heart always went out to them. I never thought I was better. Even though I came from a different place, but Joey Ramone was like this, hey you're a little weird, c'mon in. You know a lot of that old punk rock attitude like Johnny Rotten was...

But hold on, Joe Strummer did name the Minutemen as his second favorite punk band of all time in *Spin*.

But I'm talking about the whole attitude of being angry at people, especially Johnny Rotten, who I met a few times. I don't know what his favorite bands are, but there's always been an aggressive attitude. I don't know what happened. Maybe he was forced into it by his role. I don't know if he's naturally that way. But Joey was definitely a guy that thought punk was big enough for everybody. It just seems like some of those English punk guys, well, it got big there really early, so you can't blame them personally. They were all on major labels. They were rock stars, popular musicians. So maybe there was a competitive edge there, but if we tore down other bands, it would have been counter-productive. If you tried to keep together and be original, and not be a rip off, it was a good thing. Over there, there were managers, a whole different thing. More like an actual scene, the Jam, Clash, big bands. Somebody told me that Joe Strummer said that, but it's strange because I don't know how he knows about us. You've got to understand, we didn't even know that people in Denver knew about us. That's why fanzines were so important, because people just told you about different scenes. You didn't know, and when you toured, you stayed at their houses. It was very much a network, kind of what the Internet is today. Fanzines were a big part of punk culture. Wire and Pop Band had a huge influence on us. In Hollywood, some of them got very successful, and went on to hard rock. It was like, you graduate from punk, now we're in rock'n'roll, the real stuff. I mean it happened with Brian Baker...

Courtesy of Kevin Scanlon



From Minor Threat.

Who was in Junkyard. I mean it happened to Bad Religion too. That second record sounds like REO Speedwagon to me. But music is for guys to try out things. There's no rules that say you have to go by certain things. They just came from different places. We were at war with rock'n'roll, and we were different than them. Not better, we just reached different conclusions. Like Coltrane said, music is a big reservoir. But I don't want people to say we lost the war and that's why music sucks today. What the fuck's that? Like we're better than Matchbox 20 or something? That's why I try to be conscious of what I am saying. What I try to do is get people inside my mind, and I still call myself punk rock, so I have to deal with this all the time. Back in those days, if you considered yourself punk, you didn't say, "I'm punk." Now, people say, how are you punk rock? You look like my dad. I just try and talk about those days and why I still feel a part of the punk movement. That was an important part of my life. That scene was fertile enough to get me and George out there.

What was it like to see the reformed Wire?

Um, well what's it going to be? Nostalgia, sentimentalism? They moved on too. They used not to play the old songs until a few years ago. Or like my daddy used to say, those were not happy days. He hated the '50s. It's always better looking back. I just talk about it because sometimes it sounds like I am being hard on people, but Wire was a big influence. A lot of people think they were one

I'm not into Pink Floyd, but I'm into Syd Barrett, and I think that Hitler was one of the first rock stars. I'm not afraid to admit that.

of the better punk bands. I side with Richard Hell, who I talked to once about punk rock.

Who was walking around in New York with a ripped shirt even before Johnny Rotten was singing Alice Cooper songs on the jukebox at Malcolm's shop Sex.

But I think Rotten's singing is the one thing that makes the Pistols different, because he doesn't act like all the English singers before him and try to hide his accent. Like in New York City when everyone saw the Dolls, they thought this was new music, because there was new clothes and a new look on this Jewish guy from Lexington, KY. One of them was kicked out of reform school in Delaware. They ran off to New York in 1970 and didn't really fit in.

What about your book?

It's a book, but not really something I wrote. It's a collection of my lyrics I wrote in the Minutemen. Tour diaries from the Black Flag, and some words from Richard Meltzer and Thurston Moore. I probably got 60 lyrics from the Minutemen. In fact, it will be in French and English, which is a trip. I have been asked many times to write a book, but I don't think I'm at that point in my life yet. I'm still in the living the life part. I'm passionate about my diaries. I put them up on my website, which is kind of part of the fanzine tradition. The web has no gatekeeper, it's anything you want.

You've mentioned that rock writers in the future might only write web pages instead of print articles.

Every writer should have his own page.

D. Boon once said that every block should have a rock band?

Yeah, you could do it. A band. I told you we had a thing against rock. We loved Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis, but by the time it got to the '70s bands, it stopped working. They got all the people lumped together, got them all to sound like the same thing, and all has the same goals in life.

But even Ian MacKaye said he loved to see Ted Nugent because of the naked, magnetic animalism.

They mean different things to different people. I don't think there should be a line you walk. I'm just saying one of the reasons why I'm at war with that is my own fucking deal, my own business. I see very dangerous things about it. Those people get away with everything. It creates a whole upper class. To me, rock'n'roll is some dishwasher from Mississippi who wants to put on a dress and yell "Tutti Frutti." It's not about being popular, or making someone big and they get whatever they want. If you talk to kids about what they think about music, it's all this bizarre stuff. It's not about proving you're alive, it's all about, I wish I were him. It's all like hollow men who know he can't live up to that. I'm not into Pink Floyd, but I'm into Syd Barrett, and I think that Hitler was one of the first rock stars. I'm not afraid to admit that. It's dangerous, like all the swastikas, and every unit had a drummer boy.

During the Gulf War, the soldiers were playing "Rock the Casbah" before the bombing campaign.

Well, I heard the pilots got "We Will Rock You" while the soldiers got "Mandatory Suicide" by Slayer. And when you hear it, you do get those kinds of feelings. You gotta watch out though, you can get a little swayed, like Edgar Allen Poe said your mind will explore thoughts just because they are there, even if they are bad ones. There's some fascist shit about this stuff. A kind of herding mentality that goes on, which is scary, because you would think it's an empowering individual thing. I would like to play up that tendency, not the fucking herd tendency, we have enough of that mainly through consumer culture. I feel that rock'n'roll panders to consumer culture. I don't know if that's what it was about in the first place, and it was never about that for me, so am I supposed to make a career move and just don that church of rock'n'roll robe. That's why that shit bothers me. It's power and control. With me, I am trying to show the experience I first had when I started going to punk shows. I'm trying to do that for the kids in a weird way. I'm not trying to live up to that shit, I'm trying to live up to the personal utopia I felt in my life where I could play anything I want and D. Boon could help me. We don't have to live up to anything. We are too weird looking, we are too lower class, hell, we could do anything we want. Hell, we could blow minds one day like ours were blown. And in turn, improve these kids, or whoever, people our age or older, and show them that they can take chances and not cater to the flavor of the week.

Do you think the lasting legacy of the Minutemen may not be the music, but the philosophy?

I hope so, but I am proud that the Minutemen have their own sound. It's weird, because we got to the point where we could play slow, fast, whatever, and you could still tell it was the Minutemen. I don't know how we did it, because we were so drenched in Creedence. But those English guys helped us. They were inspiring and gave us ideas, like writing little, fuck format, get rid of solos. Then Pop Group and Beefheart showed us how to take it farther. I know it sounds naïve, but in those days it was like, why not? The Minutemen is a combination of a lot of accidents, so we'll be known for all those accidents. And of course there was philosophy, because it was the first time we fucking thought about things. I didn't even know what the fuck lyrics were for. I thought they were like lead guitar. You talked about women and bongwater. My favorite song was "It's Alright Ma,", and I thought he was trying to talk about some kind of sensibility where you just had to fucking think about things and not get caught up in images. I really didn't think there were instructions or it was meant to be connected to events and stuff. Some people tried to figure out what the words were, but I didn't. Lyrics had a whole other meaning to me after punk. Blue Oyster Cult? I didn't know what the fuck they were saying. T. Rex… I didn't even know John Fogerty. I didn't even know the fucking "Proud Mary" was a boat. After I got older, I realized the big wheels were the paddle wheel, and thought, this guy's working on the fucking boat. I just didn't think about music that way. I'm trying to get better. I'm trying to be a sponge. I'm trying not to get stuck in one perspective. You have to be open to new sensations. Sometimes you don't choose it, it just happens. I was married for six years, and that was very hard when it ended. But to get perspective, you can't take things for granted. When you are a young man, you think you are indestructible, and those lessons are hard to come by but it takes a life to live, because it all comes from different angles and shows you different things. That's why I have a lot of respect for teachers, because it's a lot easier to tell people what to do than inspire people to do things. When you're in the military, and have a gun at your back, you have to listen. When you are in a band, you can't just tell them, you have to inspire them. I'm still learning how to pull the best out of them like D. Boon did, that's why I need people like Jay or Perry sometimes.

Stoner Rock Denial: An Interview with Cosmic Plunderers...

Nebula

There's heavy, like Black Sabbath's curdling, seismic wave of heaviness on *Vol. 4*, or the minimalist pummeling of early Swans songs, like "Greed" and "Raping a Slave," and then there's the psychedelic blasphemy of Nebula in full action. They bend chords with the ease of Iron Man, and lay down a thick fog of guitar roar that sends shudders down your spine, but it's the loose and oiled drum beat, like Ginger Baker on Quaaludes snapping a beat with tentacles for hands, that makes it all worth the ride. Nebula is the essence of New Heavy, and have dug the crater of rock'n'roll that others must fill.



Courtesy of Subpop Records

So are the rock crowds bigger in Europe?
They're bigger. Usually it's more about what size the city is than it is about where it is. Like Hamburg or London is similar to Chicago and New York, the same amount of people. It's more about the city. I think people are pretty much the same…

People don't have different expectations than a crowd in Chicago?
No, not really. You could try and say that, and say oh, man, people in Germany are not as hip as people in Chicago, but it's not true. You can play a place like Dusseldorf, where people are not as up on the scene as people in New York. But if you go to a major city, it's basically the same.

So why did you choose John Agnello as co-producer on the new record?
Well, when we were doing this next record we were thinking of people to record with, and his name came up, and we got a hold of him and talked to him about ideas and what we wanted to do. He had a studio that he works in, a good studio, and he's worked with Dinosaur Jr. and Mark Lanegan, so he's sort of in our league, you know.

How is he a different producer than Jack Endino, who did your last record?
Just a bit different in techniques and just in terms of overall construction of sound. Jack can have a more garagey attitude with his ideas, like singing through amplifiers and distortion pedals. He'd be like, let's sing a

song through a big muff through a twin reverb amp. And he'd do it. It's a bit different, like the difference between guitar players. Everybody's got their own style.

I know you like Black Flag and 13th Floor Elevators, and whereas you do sound a lot like 1982-era Black Flag, do you think your sound or your attitude resembles 13th Floor Elevators?

With us? Maybe lyrics here and there. You know, not really straight off. I listen to them probably more than I do Black Flag.

It creeps in?

I don't take any direct guitar sounds or any kind of recording techniques from them, I just fucking enjoy that band. I don't know where it comes in, I don't think about things like that really. I just know that I listen to them a lot.

You started playing drums around age 7, and guitar at 14?

Yeah, all those ages are approximate.

But how did you being a drummer shape your guitar playing?

The rhythm seems a little bit better. Just overall, I started off on drums, so when I picked up the guitar I already had an idea about songwriting and structures. It's really good for writing songs, because I could write the whole song, drums and all.

You've said that you have to get everything out of your head completely before you start a new song. Why is that important?

I was just talking influence wise. Like say, you can see some similarities between Black Flag, or between this and that, but you can't really. If I really wanted to sound like another band I was listening to, I'd be able to. Plus when I write music and write songs I deal with 8-track home recordings and have to clear everything and see what comes naturally. That's what I mean by clearing everything out, it's sort of like once I start writing a song and putting it down to tape, I usually just try and stick to that. You spend hours at the rehearsal studio trying to work it out and you get stressed, then get in your car and go home and listen to all these other band's records, then you lose the feeling of what you had going. Or you can become subconsciously influenced by what you are listening to at the time. So whenever I start working on songs, I usually try to stick to that in order to keep everything fresh in my head. It's like if you're an artist, and you're painting a picture, then you're not going to go and visit some galleries in the middle of the painting.

So why is it that it's always the easy songs you tend to fuck up on once in awhile?

Live or in the studio?

Both.

Well, live it's because it's so easy that you end up doing something, like I'm going to fucking jump in the air and roll around on this song. Or in the studio sometimes you're putting it down and you're not concentrating, while with the harder songs you completely think about it and try really hard to get through that take and stuff. While with the easier ones, you're like, wait, hold on a second, let's re-do that again.

At what point were you guys able to walk away from your day jobs and do Nebula full-time?

I've been doing this full-time for three years now and I don't have any plans to start working any time soon.

How does three years with Nebula compare with your two years drumming for Olivelawn?

Olivelawn was definitely a small, underground garage band. This is a lot bigger. In between I played with Fu Manchu, which was a step up. Olivelawn, at the time, was taken straight from the garage, and we were like fuck you to everybody, to labels, to everybody. We enjoyed being underground and having that punk attitude, like we're not going to make any money anyway, so fuck you. Then we were like shit, maybe we could make money.

So if being in the band is like being your own boss, then what are the drawbacks?

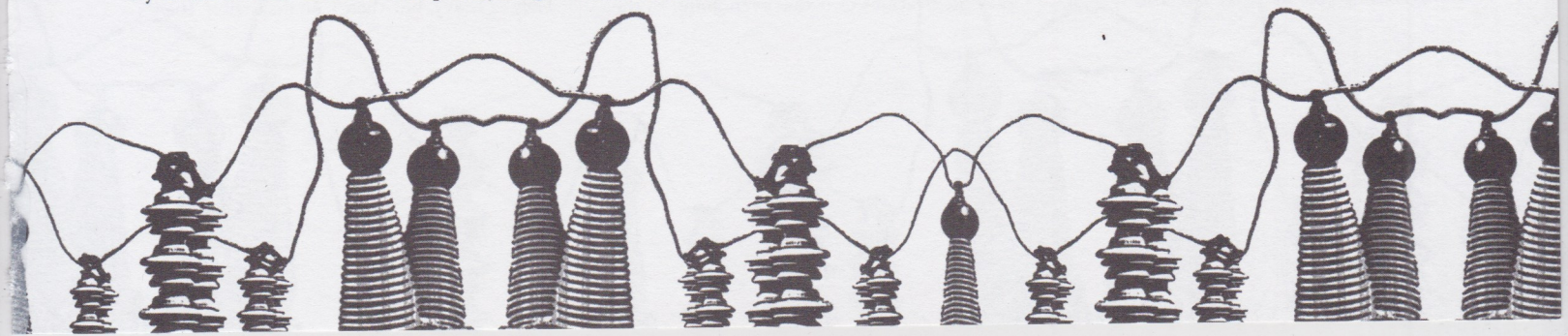
Basically having to take full responsibility, you either make money or you don't. It's not like you're working a job and someone else is making the profits, like when have your little job in the corner. It's just do or die when you're your own boss. It's not really a job, because when it works out, you're making more. You're reaping the full benefits, and if it doesn't work out, you're reaping the full bummer. So being your own boss is good.

Is it fair to say that Nebula comes from surf culture, like TSOL or Agent Orange did in the early 1980s?

I grew up in Whittier, which is L.A. county, so when I joined Olivelawn, the guitar player and bass player lived in San Diego, and the singer and I lived up here. So I didn't really surf that much. Being from California, I was more into skateboarding as a kid. I've never been that much into the beach scene, I do like to surf though. I think the whole beach thing is pretty fucking lame, and always has been. I have always just been more into music. Skateboarding was a big thing. I used to be in bands with professional skateboarders. We knew them, and we'd skate, and we knew that stuff, so it was kind of the skate thing from the 1980s, but that didn't really have anything to do with the music. It was a total opposite thing. We'd play punk rock songs in our garage, and then go skateboarding. The surfing thing wasn't crossing over into the music. It was never involved. Actually neither was skateboarding. We drew our inspiration from the city and punk rock. Just because we're from California, people start to tag you, like you must be from the beach, and go surfing and play music everyday. But it's totally separate things. I don't skate anymore, and I really don't get to the beach anymore either. Music has always been more about the streets than about the beach and any type of sport.

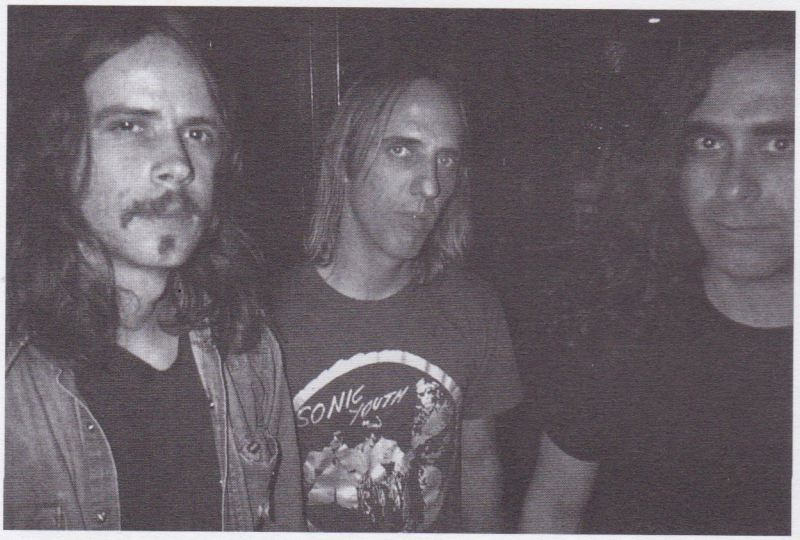
Does the difference between Nebula, Spirit Caravan, and Monster Magnet and lame, straight-ahead rock outfits have to do with a rhythm section that swings a bit?

Yeah, but I don't think we're similar at all to any of those bands anyway. A lot of the heavy bands that are in this so-called genre Stoner Rock, like a lot of it is metal based, but I don't think we have an ounce of metal in us. It's more like classic rock and a mixture of punk. By punk, I have to get this straight, I mean late-'70s English punk. That was my main influence. Then you've got Black Flag and the Circle Jerks, but I've have to say that bands like the Clash and the Sex Pistols were more of an influence than anything. But that's what makes us different, plus listening to the classic rock of Led Zeppelin or whoever it be, say the Stooges, or alternative stuff like Dinosaur Jr. Which is different than when you go out and see High on Fire or Spirit Caravan, you get a sense of heavy metal, Slayer, and roar, bang your head. We're not really bang your head. It's like you could do it to a few songs, and sometimes people get confused. Like at our shows, the headbangers get to a part, and they start banging their heads, then



the part will change, and they'll be like, what's up? Where am I? In the wrong fucking scene buddy! It's adrenaline-based music. It's part of those things about being a drummer that makes me write songs like that. When I write the song, I am very conscious of the drum parts. I like to keep the drumming exciting and high energy, so it's not just like, du-blat, du-blat. Then just the fact that the influences are more of a blues…

When we're talking the blues, are we talking Johnny Winters, or Muddy Waters?



We're very classic blues type of guitar any Slayer in our that in other bands. the place. It has a of scale. If you and start talking

First, we start from before I knew about the blues, when I heard Led Zeppelin, Lynrd Skynrd, Rolling Stones, and all that stuff. You hear those songs and finally realize, this is a cover song. This is back when I was a teenager and heard Zeppelin do this Muddy Waters song, so I went out and got Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, and Sonny Boy Williamson records. So I started researching that and getting into the blues. But I think it was really spawned off by the second generation, the first white guys to put rock'n'roll into its state where it's at. I used to go to the record swap meets and find and collect all these blues records and then when I first started playing guitar, I'd play along to records. I'd play along to blues things and I was being so simple. The thing about the blues is that it's very structured. The difference between rock'n'roll and the blues is that rock'n'roll is derived from the blues, right, but the blues is a very structured formula, with a three-chord pattern. That simple box scale. With the later stuff they started adding extra pieces in there. The lead type of stuff that I play is a blues scale, the pentatonic blues scale is what they call it, which is pretty much what everybody in rock'n'roll has used since the beginning days of the Rolling Stones and the Yardbirds, which morphed into rock'n'roll. You can make the blues scale sound not like a classic blues song, and that's what basically all the bands did by interpreting that and adding extra notes and pedals and sounds on top of things like that.

Gibby from the Butthole Surfers was on Politically Incorrect once and tried to convince everyone that rock'n'roll started with guys in East Texas playing blues on their front porches.

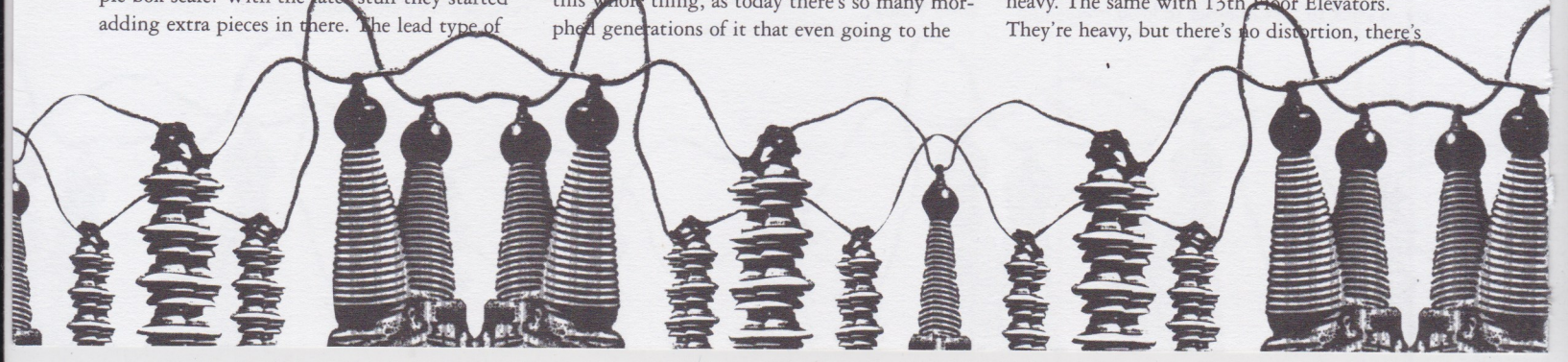
That's where the origins are in that sense. I've heard a lot of people talk about the origins of rock'n'roll, and of course it's a blues scale that the guitarists are playing. Those structures are basically blues. But the difference between blues and rock'n'roll is a different thing. All of our heroes listened to the blues because they're from the late-1960s, the first rock'n'roll explosion, like in London. I have to give those guys the credit, because if you go back to the blues, okay, then you're going to have to go back to the 30s, Cab Calloway, then if you go back to Calloway then you have to go back to ragtime. Where did it actually start? Rock'n'roll in its form today spawned off punk and metal, and anything with guitars started from the Stones, Beatles, Who, Yardbirds, Cream, which then went into the MC5, Stooges, all these different forms. Blues is obviously very important in this whole thing, as today there's so many morphed generations of it that even going to the Yardbirds, you can barely hear anything connected, and even going back further to Howlin' Wolf…

"Heavy, to me, is just soul," you once said. So maybe the easiest connection to see is in the soul of the music?

Like I said, I'm using a blues scale in my leads and guitar playing, and that's where blues comes from in our music. That's the base. The way I am working off it is more in the way of the first rock'n'rollers than it is the classic blues players. So I'll agree with Gibby that rock'n'roll was spawned by the blues. But if it were so derivative of the blues, you'd be calling rock'n'roll the blues. That's the difference, it's not the three-chord structure, and it's not the repeating vocal pattern. They started adding different lines, and different structures to it, but then they would play guitar leads that were like blues. So my lead guitar playing is very blues based, and that's what separates us from bands that are playing today. We're very classic Jimmy Page, Yardbirds, blues type of guitar leads. You can't hear any Slayer in our music, but you can hear that in other bands. You hear that all over the place. It has a whole different type of scale. If you want to get geeky and start talking about scales…

But why is "heavy soul"?

It doesn't need to be in your face loud with distortion, it can be like putting on the Beatles "Happiness is a Warm Gun" and it's mellow. There are acoustic guitars all over it, but it's heavy. The same with 13th Floor Elevators. They're heavy, but there's no distortion, there's



nothing that you would think of as heavy today. Or "The Man Who Sold the World" by David Bowie. It's heavy, because of the soul of the music. I mean heavy doesn't mean distortion and loud.

Or chunky?
Yeah. Even an acoustic song by Bob Dylan is heavy to me.

I know you hate the term "stoner rock". Is it because it's an easy way for writers to dismiss the music?
We really don't think about the term that much. When you say I hate the term, it's not like I walk around with my fist clenched saying, don't call us stoner rock. In a way, at least it's a new term, a new genre of music. Forget about the name itself, it's about having a new music form come up and being tagged as something separate, and identifiable in a way is a good thing. Except that they came up with this derogatory stupid-ass name. It's similar to punk rock. It's similar to grunge. They always come up with stupid names. But when there's a movement worthy of being called something, I think that in itself is cool. It was the same thing with the late 1970s bands from the punk rock era.

Punk was a dismissive term.
Yeah. And what is a punk? A kid, a teenager. So you got these bands like the Clash, the Pistols, Stiff Little Fingers, bands that I think are great. These people were presenting a new form of music, and then of course it wasn't the band members, it wasn't the musicians, it wasn't anybody but the press and writers saying, uh, punk rock. They started using that, and the band members were like, "we're not punk," in the interviews. It was kind of like the same thing. Then grunge came along, and then it was like, ooh, grunge music, but what does that mean? It's a new form of music that was worthy of being separate itself. There's always like bands from each genre that are good, at the top, free of it, then there are bands thrown in with it. I bet there are fifty bands to every Clash. So when they say, oh, they're a new punk band, or all the grunge bands that came out. You had Nirvana and Mudhoney at the top reaches of it, and then you have fifty bands for every good band. Then what happens next? Around 1993, 1994, there was Kyuss, Fu Manchu, Monster Magnet, and at the time we were the only ones doing this new form of grunge. I guess, because we were all playing in bands during that time and went through it. It seems like grunge was a similar idea. It was guitar oriented with pedals and big muffs, like yeah, grow your hair long because we just got out of the '80s and are tired of punk rock. But grunge started getting a bit funny, jokey.

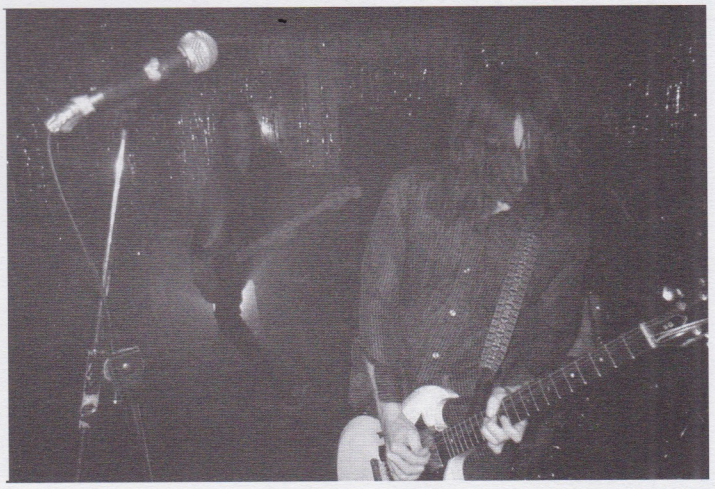
Comical?
Yes, plus full of self-inflicted lyrics. Like, "I'm so bummed out" and "I'm going to kill you and I'm going to kill me!" So the next thing, with stoner rock bands like I mentioned, they started taking that and put a little more blues and classic rock in with it. It was a mixture of what we grew up on as part of the grunge and punk scenes. We kind of took that, the guitars and pedals of grunge, and put that together with some pieces from the punk scene, kind of just got serious, you know. Erased the self-afflicted bummer lyrics and started to sing about things that made us happy.

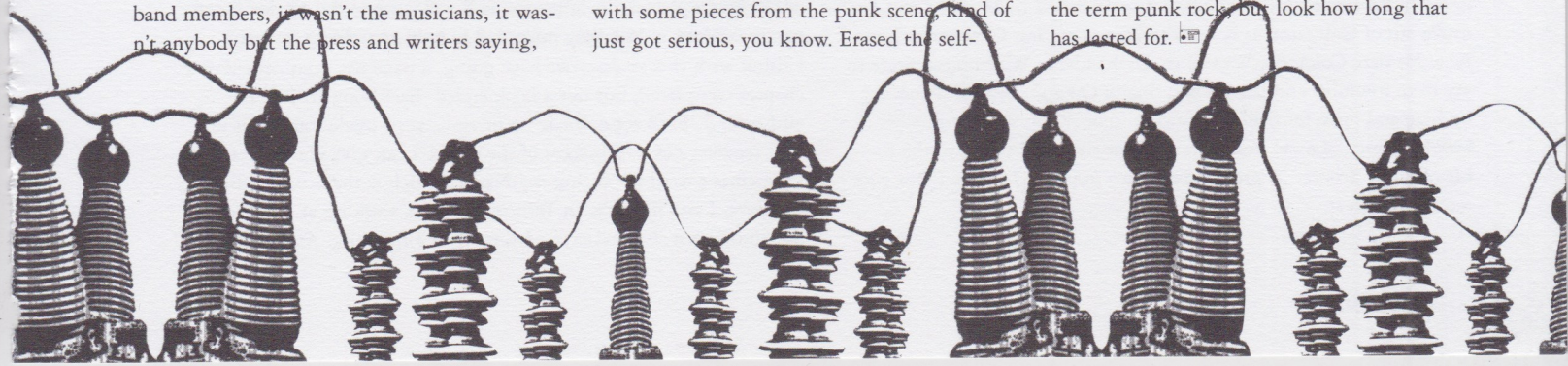
You toured with both Mudhoney and Monkeywrench, so was there a good connection between their grunge roots and Nebula's roots?
In Olivelawn, we played with Mudhoney, so I met those guys back then. I've known them since then, so it's like we're peers, so when we started playing again, it was the same type of thing. In terms of the pigeonholing, Mudhoney had the same thing too. They fought so hard to get out from the grunge label. And in stoner rock like out of the good bands that are doing something original and really good with it, there's fifty that are copying us that suck.

Stoner rock has produced its own industry, including web sites, labels, and more.
It sucks that they use such a stupid name for it. Think if it was called something cool, I dunno, anything, like psyche rock, or heavy psyche rock, then it would be cool. So it would be cool if someone said, what do you think of this new form of music? Yeah, totally. But then you put this stupid tag on it. What is a stoner? I hate stoners. For me, growing up in California, stoners were opposite of what I was into. I was never like that.

It's not 1975, and kids aren't driving around in a Camaro listening to Nebula.
In a way, you have to look and instead of saying, we hate it, we just recognize it as a new form of music. It's just called a term as lame as the term punk rock, but look how long that has lasted for.

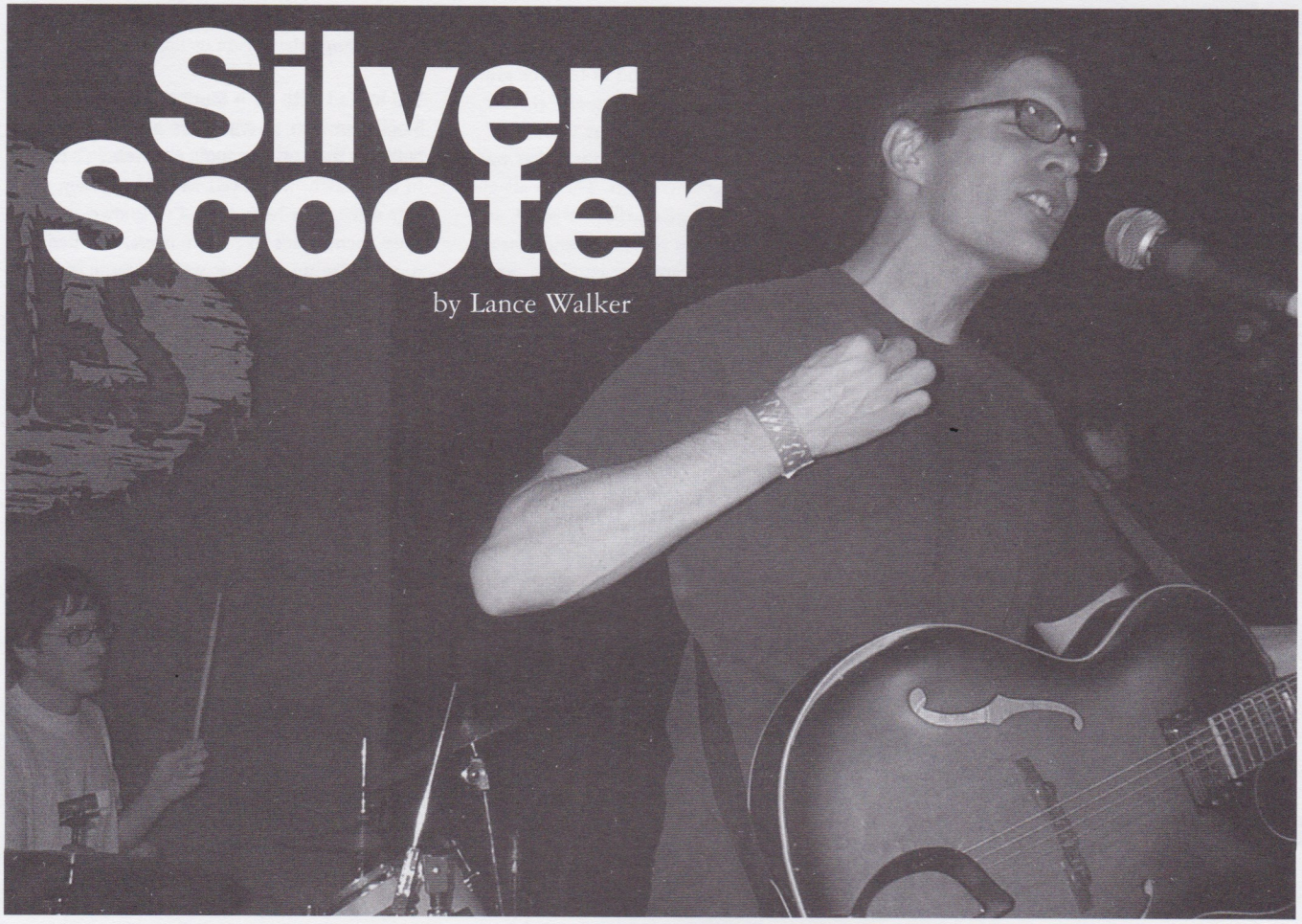
Jimmy Page, Yardbirds, leads. You can't hear music, but you can hear You hear that all over whole different type want to get geeky about scales ..,





Silver Scooter

by Lance Walker



Every band gets put to rest eventually. The musicians make their final appearance onstage together, those all-familiar songs get their last run-through, memories crowd the mind with every bit of joy that all involved created together, and those same people move on to new things. Silver Scooter, in their final incarnation of Scott Garred, Tom Hudson, Tyler Mallory and Shawn Camp, did just that this past December, signing off with a pair of farewell shows in Houston and their hometown of Austin. After ten US tours, three albums, a handful of singles and two trips to Japan, singer and guitar player Scott was making the move across the country to start anew. Those fragile but intent broken-hearted melodies we'd all been endeared with for years were available for just one more listen. Equal parts lonesome cowboy as they were fiery indie rockers, the boys brought us a connection in the art of communicating heartache and hope. So many stories about lost loves and loves not missed, soothing melodies from the voice of a boy not left behind by his experiences but instead a man who steps right over them and into the next one. Silver Scooter was a band of many facets, but most importantly they were a band that told you stories you'd never forget. I had the opportunity to sit down with Scott after the farewell shows and talk about Silver Scooter, his solo project Super XX Man, and the new life he'll be making for himself in Portland.

You've just completed your move across the country and put your band of 6 years to bed. What's going through your mind right now?
Driving long days as if on tour. Like many tours we drove long hours, stopping very little to rest or eat. I did have a guitar, but no club or load in/soundcheck to find me. We were simply driving to our new home in Portland - fun in the Focus as we called it. Michelle and I drove out of Galveston as it was there we spent our Christmas. Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, Idaho, Washington State to say hi to my folks and family, and finally Oregon. Beautiful country up here and open for fishing, hunting, school, job searching, what have you, etc...Shows? Yes, certainly, but they will not have the rumble of Silver Scooter. A great band in my opinion. I feel sad, but content. I feel great.

Tremendous of you to mention Galveston, by the way - I was born and raised there. What part of the book has been closed? I mean, when you write songs, you write about emotions that were current when the song was created, perhaps something from long in the past or even something you anticipate happening. Now that those songs aren't being played live anymore, is it a closure to the stories those songs contain, or will they never fail to hold something for you?
I think with this analogy we have going, a page has been turned or a chapter completed, but not a book ended. Each song still holds all I gave it. Each song, made up or real - yes I made some of it up, dear readers! - evokes images of the times. I can give you an example. I remember writing "Biting my Nails," which is the Scooter's first A-side ever. I was living with Tom at the time, working at a photo lab, not enjoying it, but believing I was on to something. And in that

song I found courage in my friend Tom. That's what I remember. Now, I may never play that tune again, but I don't really need to in order to enjoy the story that is my life, truth, turd, or fiction.

You bring up Tom Hudson here, which is a good lead-in to my next question. As the drummer of Silver Scooter, obviously he has been a big part of your musical ventures in that you have played together in three different projects, but he's also been one of your closest friends over the years as well, hasn't he?

Yes. Tom and I have that unspoken bond of chemistry. I know that when he and I set up shop together, good things happen. I always thought that one of the best things about S.S was the way the melodies got smashed around by his drumming. He really knows how to play to a singer. The best things about music of our type is drums and vocals. WE always believed that. Tom and I have played together 10 years. I still say we play together as we always will. Some day we will again. Our friendship was always centered around the music we shared. We lived together off and on, but what has always been at the center of it is the music.

Do you think that playing with other folks now will change the way you arrange your songs? Has it in the past?

Good question. I think so. I mean, I just finished a solo record with my friend Shannon Halbrook of United Space and it definitely has maintained a Scott Garred sort of feel, but the arrangements are heavily influenced by Shannon, who brings a desire to have more instrumental/solo sections in the tunes. Overall, though, I have a formula which doesn't change too much. If it ever becomes stale to me I'll hopefully know right away. I'm sure someone will tell me, anyway!

How much more have you learned about yourself as a musician through playing solo?

Back in the early days of S.S. I didn't hear myself too well and so I shouted everything, hardly ever in key either! As I got more and more into it, especially the songwriting process, I felt obligated in a way, to myself, to be a better songwriter and singer, above all. My guitar playing has never really progressed beyond the basic level, but I do believe my voice has gotten better, maybe smoother too. And now that I can hear myself as a solo performer, it's important to me to sing in pitch.

What are you listening to these days? What was the soundtrack for your trip across the country?

Let's see... across the great country. We missed Nebraska so we listened to Bruce Springsteen's *Nebraska*. Willie, of course! Neil Young, Bonnie Prince Billie, Smog too. Hmmm... Patti Smith, Buddy Holly and Jimmy Dale Gilmore around their hometown of Lubbock. Julie Doiron, Dinosaur Jr. Lots of stuff, really... Magnetic Fields.

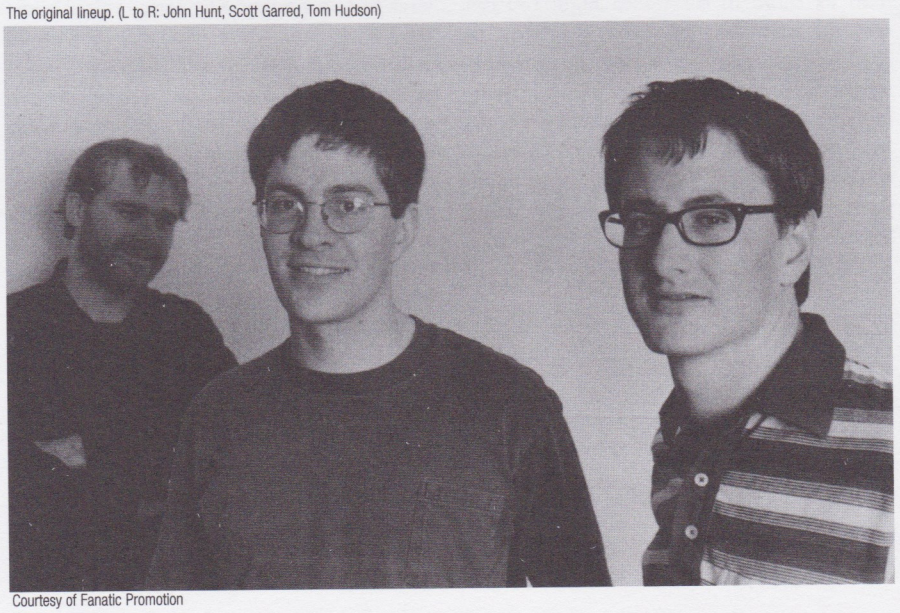
So what's on tap for the future? New songs, recording bands, marriage?

Right now I'm concentrating on finding a new home for this solo record I made and I may start playing some shows up here in the NW. We'll see about all that as the year unfolds. Currently, I'm in school studying Music Therapy. I'm in the first week of the program so my mind is still taking it all in, along with the move up here and everything else about getting oriented to a new town.

Any final thoughts?

Final thoughts... Hmmm... I look back on my years in Austin and I can truly say they will be remembered forever. Specifically, every note Silver Scooter ever played.

The original lineup. (L to R: John Hunt, Scott Garred, Tom Hudson)



Courtesy of Fanatic Promotion

I also had a chance to get in a couple of words with the aforementioned Tom Hudson. That went as follows:

What parts of being in Silver Scooter will you remember and miss the most?

I think the early days living together in the apartment. We had just moved to Austin and didn't know anybody. We rented the *Lonely Guy* with Steve Martin, and could really relate to the character. That's when we four tracked Scott's Lonely Guy song. I think it might be called Bottlecaps. One of the early Super XX Man songs.

What do you have lined up musically in the future?

John, the old bass player of Silver Scooter, said he might want to do a project with him back on bass again. I know I definitely will be focusing more on Subset, the other band I play drums in. I would like to do something different than pop, but that's a hard genre to get around. Maybe new wave?

Silver Scooter's last release is called Blue Law *and is available from Peek-A-Boo records:*
www.peekaboorecords.com
email them at: silverscooter@hotmail.com

SILVER SCOOTER DISCOGRAPHY

CDs & LPs
"Blue Law" (Peek-a-Boo, 2001)
"Orleans Parish" (Peek-a-Boo, 1999)
"The Other Palm Springs" (Peek-a-Boo, 1997)

EPs & 10's
"Goodbye" EP (Peek-a-Boo, 2000)
Silver Scooter/Cursive Split 10" and CD (Crank!, 1998)

7"s
Silver Scooter/Tiara split (Voice of the Sky, 1998)
"Tribute to the Phone Calls" (Peek-a-Boo, 1998)
"Cup and String" (Crank!, 1996)
"Ball of Yarn" (Swingline, 1996)
"Biting My Nails" (Peek-a-Boo, 1996)

COMPILATIONS
"Bob's BBQ" on Stay Tuned for the Holidays CD (Crank!, 2000)
"Morning View" on When it was as Good as Pillow Talk CD (Round Circle Records, 2000)
"If Nonsense Only Knew" on Self-Portrait 7" (Permafrost, 1998)
"Holding the Flare" on From the Bullpen CD (Hey Buddy, 1997)
"Pumpkin Eyes" on Don't Forget to Breathe CD & LP (Crank!, 1997)
"Hearts and Stars" on KVRX Local Live, Vol.1 (KVRX radio, Austin, TX)

THE (INTERNATIONAL) NOISE CONSPIRACY

Politics make a hell of a lot more sense when you burn your dog-eared Lenin and Mao paperbacks and have sex until the moon falls from its chord in the leaden night. You can vote for imbeciles and party programs, or shake your ass and forge a new Internationale between your hips. Okay, that's bullshit. But it leans more towards the philosophy of the International Noise Conspiracy more than any whiny tirades from Jello Biafra (who pooh-poohed a really good vegetarian restaurant in Sweden, says Dennis…That's not surprising).

With his vegan tattoo right above his skinny wrist and his straight-edge tattoo bolted across his baking soda white backside, 29-year-old singer Dennis is an old-fashioned lover of justice and human dignity, and a lover of deep embraces and wet kisses, or so I pretend. He loves the curling thunder of Dinosaur Jr. records, and was once obsessive/compulsive about Gorilla Biscuits, and still reads like a motherfucker and makes me believe that the revolution is a Palm Pilot away, no, I mean an MTV 2 video away, no, I mean right back in the MC5 testament, "You can be part of the problem, or part of the solution…" Well, damnit, he just makes me believe.



Most people think of Sweden as a socialist country.

Well, compared to America it would be. There's some fairness to that statement, because we used to have health care, elderly care, and childcare that the government supplied, but it doesn't anymore. So in that sense it used to be that, and in the last ten years that has changed a lot. And I think that Sweden has to adapt to the market economy that we have today, and they are totally selling out all those ideas that made Sweden a really good country to live in. I would say that it is like any other country in the world pretty much, but it's still a little...Well, it has aspects to it that are really good, but most of that is disappearing by the minute actually.

Has the erosion of those ideas led, in part, to your political radicalism?

Oh yeah definitely. I think the first political radicalism you get into is the bigger abstract things, but then when you actually view the world around you and see it change from year to year, you see how it affects your parents or grandparents or people around you, it becomes very obvious. The first time I came to the United States was in 1996, and it's scary to see Sweden going in that direction. That can't be a good thing *(laughs)*.

Did you think the Americanization will filter down into every sector of society?

Oh yeah. I mean it's kind of hard, because we still have a Socialist-Democratic government, but it's not very socialistic at all any more. For instance, the right wing controls the city of Stockholm and they're totally privatizing everything. All the rock clubs are getting shut down because you can't afford to have them anymore. It's the whole gentrification thing of the inner cities, like let's have rich people live in the inner city and move everybody else out. It's kind of weird.

Some Eastern Europeans have expressed some skepticism about your politics, which is heightened by the fact that they lived behind the Iron Curtain for so long.

Yeah, I think that when you get into what we're saying, our critique of capitalism is equally a critique of the Eastern Bloc. We never said that was something to strive for at all. We talk about socialistic-anarchic ideas that far supercede the actual state capitalism that we feel they had in the former Eastern Block. But we can see them being skeptical because they have been told for so long that this is communism, and people say, oh yes, this is communism, and it pretty damn sucks, so I can see how people can be skeptical about it. But that's not what we're talking about. Our critique is as valid on labor, working forces, alienation from work, those kind of power structures that are equally imbedded in the so-called communist cultures. It was on based on ideas that were good 100 years ago and all, but they've turned into instead... Well, the dictatorship of the proletariat ended up being the dictatorship of the few and as in America, the power structure serves to keep the power structure intact, not to serve the people.

Usually only around 20% of the people joined the Communist Party.

Yeah, so I can see people being skeptical, but if they sit down and read about it, they'll realize that we're in no way defending the Soviet Union or anything like that.

How did your critique apply when you went on your first tour, which was in China, and how did you end up there to begin with?

Well, we ended up going because we have a friend that lives in Hong Kong, and he was sorta joking around. He saw one of our first shows ever, and he was like, you guys are great, you should put out a record on my label. And we were joking and said, if you bring us over to China, we'll put out a record. He said, okay, cool.

And he did?

Yeah, we were like, all right. We recorded a couple of songs, sent them to him, and he put out the record. We were there for a month, and played fifteen shows. We were the first band to actually tour China. It was really tricky to go to China as a political band. Like there are so many aspects of it. First off, you go there and see how people are being treated, how human life is also being commodified as much as it is over here, maybe even more bluntly there, because people there labor for the government, and not for themselves at all. So that was tricky, and we were worried, like can we actually talk about politics? It was totally illegal. Well, it wasn't illegal to be there, because we were tourists, but we really couldn't play there, so it was kind of illegal. Then we realized that no one speaks English, no one talked at all in English, so we were like, ugh. But I was like, well, I can pretty much say what I like because people won't understand me anyway. We realized though that this was not going to be a tour where we talked about politics, it was an adventure and we would just play music. Then there's the implication, or the fact, that we came over with rock music and people were really excited. A lot of people are trying to break free of the traditional Chinese culture and do something else. What you feel when you come over is that maybe they're generally excited by us because we play rock music, but then again rock music is just another cultural import from Western culture. Well, they have McDonalds at Tienamen Square, and Dunkin' Donuts in Beijing, so here comes rock music. In that sense, we felt really stupid. True, we are the imperialists bringing you more of this fine American culture...

Even though you're Swedish.

But all of us are children of rock-'n'roll culture in a lot ways, so we came there and it kind of freaked us out, but at the same time hopefully people could get inspired just to play music. It was very fascinating, because being the first western rock band over there is so weird. People never ever saw five white people play punk rock before, so you could just imagine, people didn't know what to think. We'd do a kick or knee drop and people would just start clapping, and we were like, what? We played this festival, like a rock festival, and there was like 6-700 people there at this big auditorium. So imagine us playing in front of 700 Chinese people. And there was like eight other punk type bands from that region, people were like going crazy when we played. It was unbelievable, and we were like, what is happening here? It's definitely like after playing music for a long time and being disillusioned with just playing music, it was really inspiring to go there and see the effect that music can have on people, and know we were there when a scene got started.

One thing you've said is that music and art are all image, poise, and surface, but how does that idea hold up over there?

That's the hard thing. Our perspective on art is that it is a lot of just selling or surface, and selling or old ideas, but at the same time, we live in a post-modern society where people tend to make up the meanings themselves in a lot of ways. Take for example when you play shows. There's going to be a lot of people that are really excited about us being a political rock band, they're so political, cool. Then there's people who like us because we're a rock band and play good music and think that politics don't matter, or is just bullshit. Or there's a lot of people like my friends who say, everything you say and are doing is amazing, but your music kind of sucks. I think that what people extract from it is so tricky to define, especially when you come to a place where no one speaks English and you can't really sit down and talk about the tradition of avant-garde art in Europe. People would just be like, what are you talking about? It's really tricky, so what we tried is play music and inspire people. Though I think that music and art is very much in the line of bourgeois

self-realization, I still think that it's important to express yourself, and I think that music is still a good way to express yourself if you do it honestly and sort of really incorporate something that you want to accomplish with it. So in that sense we still play music. People ask us all the time, why do you still play music? Well, I love to play music. Though we can all sit down and get into deep discussions about the meaning of the artist, at the end of the day I still love to buy records and play, which I think is with the post-modern condition of living with contradictions all the time. That's something we have to struggle with on a daily basis.

There's already a blacklist of unpatriotic professors.

Yeah, yeah. It's horrible, and I think that if you could list un-American activities, we have participated in quite a few *(laughs)*. I think that talking about it and looking at what happened, there is a reason why the world looks like it does, and one of the reasons is that there has never been room in America for people that think differently. And there's always been hegemony of thinking, and I think now more than ever there's a need to talk about political ideas and a need to talk about an analysis about why America got attacked, and what is happening in Afghanistan. I think that's a really important thing to talk about.

At the same time, you've described some political bands as dystopian and unfun, so how do you not fall into that same trap?

It's tricky. First of all, we try and step back from the idea that we have all the solutions to your problems, like here's the party program that will save you. I think in the first initial stages that allows people to look at what we have and sort of pick out what they find is interesting. We can also be contradictory, and use a lot of stuff that doesn't make sense out of context. But for people, if they look at our records, there's quotes from communists, socialists, anarchists, dadaists, everything. We just try and give a guide to the history of resistance, almost a small introduction to radical political ideas. It's up to people to find out what suits them, or to say, that's a great idea, or that's a crock of shit. We try and lay it all out on the table and see if there's anything you like.

That starts a dialogue?

Exactly. We don't try to be…Well, we're not dogmatic. We don't really have a set of ideas. Well, we all in the band have a set of ideas we want to do, and that's what we try and present, all these different ideas. I think that is a good start, because any time you start pointing a finger and saying, this is what we should do, then you're already in danger of becoming really boring. But then the other thing we do is when we play live. When you get our records and when you read the manifestos, there's definitely a kind of nerdy thing to it…There's something like, here's a bunch of guys and girls from Sweden who read Michel Foucault, and that's not very amusing in itself, but we try…Well, you know what I mean. There's definitely a nerdy element to it, like we read books a lot, and you should try and read. Coming from the rock point of view of sex, drugs, and rock'n'roll, that's kind of uncool actually. We know that element exists, but if you mix that with music that we try to make very sexy, danceable, and enjoyable, and especially when we play live we want it to be more in the lines of…well, instead of being Crass, or something like that with boring political finger pointing, we want that feeling of looking in the 1970s and the Black Power movement and the bands that played the sexiest, funkiest music…

When you get our records and when you read the manifestos, there's definitely a kind of nerdy thing to it…Coming from the rock point of view of sex, drugs, and rock'n'roll, that's kind of uncool actually. We know that element exists…

Have your politics been received differently in America after Sept. 11th?

Definitely. In a way, we came and said a lot of stuff before Sept. 11th, and people who didn't really take us seriously danced around and thought, they're kind of funny, and they talk a lot about politics, but that's just whatever, that's their schtick, that's what they do, but those people I think become more offended now than amused. I think people used to think, ah, those crazy Swedes, now people actually get more offended by it. But all in all, if you just try and approach that issue, because we talk a lot about that and try to incorporate that into what we are saying, and approach it in an intelligent manner, I think you will understand what we're talking about and why we talk about it the way we talk about it. I mean there is some new age of McCarthyism here, which is really scary.

Like James Brown?

They still have the clenched fist.

But brought with it the cultural cool. You've said that with every recent major political movement there has been a musical movement too.

The problem now is that we have a really big political movement growing and not a lot of music to coincide with that. Our approach to both make it fun and make people think more is to lean towards 1970s funk Black Power than 1980s Crass. That's the kind of approach we try and have.

Is there a difference if they dance to you instead of Madonna?

Mmm, I would like to think so, but maybe I don't really know. I think in the end it's more fun that they are dancing to us because this band is based on all these political principles and ideas, and its always kind of fun to get people dancing and know that not all these

people agree with what we are saying, but they are dancing to what we're saying. They're dancing to all these political ideas. In a sense, in the world that we live in today, just dancing itself may be a very liberating act. I'd love to see people dance to Madonna than not dance at all.

Some people suggest that you are exploiting poets and philosophers like William Blake and Michel Foucault just to sell more records.

Of course, there's always this idea of selling culture and selling radicalism. I mean that's something that we know also. A lot of stuff that we include on the record is not easy or accessible enough for it to be cool. Just like Baudrillard. I don't think you use Baudrillard as a sales point ever. We could other images maybe. We made a video for "Capitalism Stole My Virginity" and thought we thought maybe we should have footage of Gothenburg and the General Rights, and yeah, we could use that and try to get it out to people, but there's also the risk of exploiting these ideas. Once you sell your ideas. In a way, Fugazi is selling the political idea to even a further extent than we are, cause their whole marketing point is, we don't have a marketing point. Not to dis Fugazi, I think they are amazing, but when you look at it that way, that's a very powerful sales point. We don't sell T-shirts and we are not a commodity, so buy the record *(laughs)*. There's always that risk of selling and corrupting the ideas, but then again I don't think that anything is that holy, and I don't think that ideas should not be able to be twisted, altered, and used for different purposes. If you are a punk rock puritan, and your goal is keeping punk rock from being exploited from big business, then of course I can see you being pissed off by bands that you see selling out or bands signed to major labels. But I'm not a puritan in that sense, and I really don't care. I think that the political ideas we have far supercede any youth culture or subculture.



I don't think that anyone will be like, "These guys quote Baudrillard, I think I am going to check out their record."

have Baudrillard or those kinds of things, I don't think that anyone will be like, these guys quote Baudrillard, I think I am going to check out their record.

But does Baudrillard now become a rock-'n'roll icon?

It would be kind of funny if he did. I don't know *(laughs)*. But any time you sell yourself to capitalism, which we do all the time, and any time you sell your art to capitalism there's always that chance of...Are we selling the idea? We had that song, "For Sale," a song off the last record, which deals with the fact that everything is for sale. The Clash said it when they were doing all the shows at the end of their career, like here we are, just selling the revolution. In today's society, there's no real way of escaping the monetary system, no matter how hardcore and DIY you are. You still work within a capitalist framework and kind of

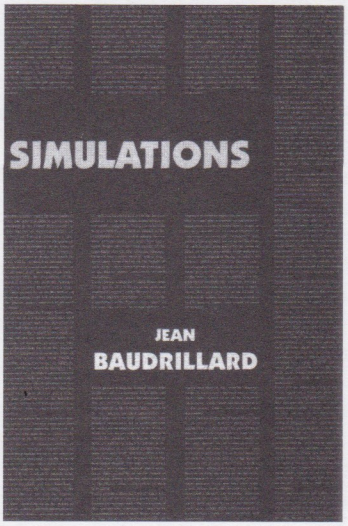
Do you think that choice itself is really a myth?

Oooh. Yeah, in a sense it is. If you come to America like, it's so crazy because there's so much to choose from. We were trying to buy cereals this morning and we were just like, ugh.

But they all practically contain the same thing.

Yeah. Exactly. People are always like, yeah, it's freedom, you get to choose between McDonalds and Burger King. That's a great choice to have. We have a line on the new record that goes, "The only choice is the refusal to pay." Because no matter what you choose, you're going to fucking pay for it, that's just how it is.

You also have the line, "The last century promised so much, and now we are outdat-



ed." If you are so outdated, why are you doing it?

I don't think that we are outdated, but I think that the big ideas of the modernistic plan of the one idea to save us all is outdated. In that sense…Well, that's a very post-modern song. It deals with the fact that last century had all these, well, you had all these ideologies that were supposed to save us all, and now we look back and it didn't. Ideology just turned into a trap for people to apply a new set of rules in their lives, and that is outdated. All the big projects went down the drain.

That is somewhat what Fukuyama states in "The End of History" when he suggests that liberal democracies have won the ideological battle.

I don't believe in the end of history bullshit. I hate that sense of post-modernism. It's like they're saying, we haven't figured out what to do, so we're going to paint up this really bleak picture and then get on with our lives as university professors. All those post-modern writers have to come up with new theories so they can maintain positions within the university hierarchy.

It's just another selling point?

It is a selling point, totally. Many of them even admit that they have to come up with something new so they can maintain their position within the hierarchy of intellectual thoughts, so I don't believe in the end of history.

Is that what you mean when you've said, "We don't want to fall into the trap of exploited nihilism?" Those professors are exploiting such nihilism to maintain a job, nice car, and two story home.

Yeah, definitely. And you read them. I like Baudrillard because of a lot of his points. I'm really into post-structuralism, but I think that a lot of the stuff is just bullshit. A lot of those people talk about the end of history, that there's nothing real, and all these abstractions but…

In China there are several things that are very real.

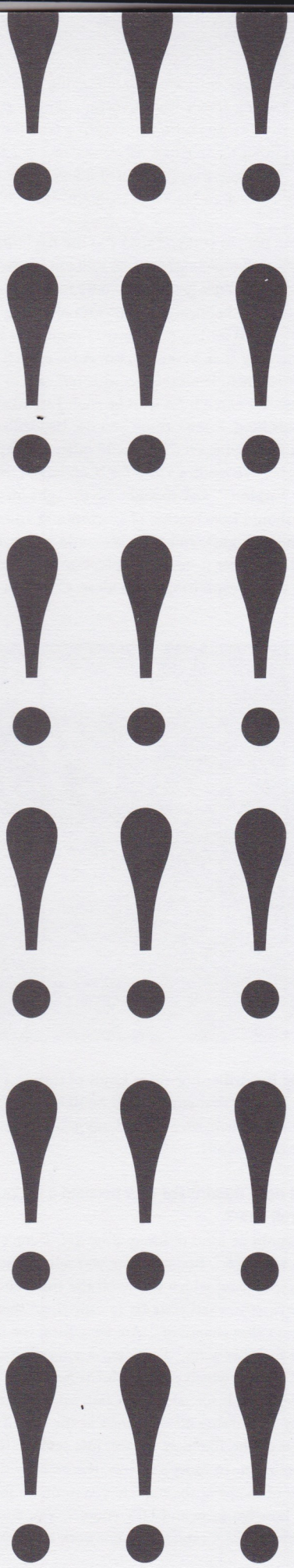
Yeah. Still here everything is real. We still have to work for eight hours a day. The power relations in our culture are still here. They might be more abstract than they used to be, but they're still here. Most of us are still at the bottom of the pyramid. A lot of those people try and transcend that.

After you paint the picture of the problem and kids read your liner notes, what's the next step?

What we expect is just to inspire people, like the way we got into music. Like when I got into music, I got into the Dead Kennedys and Born Against, bands that actually talked about politics, and they made me excited about doing shit. That's why we pack our records with quotes from books, information, and addresses, so people can see this, and if they think it is interesting, and they want to do something, we can let them know there's still tons of stuff to do out there. We're a band that talks about collectivism, so first of all, we have to do this together with other people. The myth of the individual and the American hero is just bullshit. The system needs to be changed, and that is not going to be a pretty sight. But I definitely think that we first look at our own lives. When we talk to people we usually tell them, you have to look at your own situation, like your own culture and where you are at right now. If there's something that you think is really important, then work with that and analyze that. Like go into a bookstore and choose a book that concerns you. You shouldn't read Baudrillard just because I read it, you should read something that affects your everyday life. People should just start from there. We realize that there is a big political movement growing right now and there's stuff to be done, like I talked to some kid last night, and he was like, what should we do? I was like, it's not up to me to decide what you should do, if you have imagine and guts, you can do a lot of stuff. We can get into the whole debate of, well, how productive is that and what do you accomplish by doing that, but part of liberating yourself from the tradition that we have is just to do it.

Without giving up the sense of pleasure and sexuality…

Exactly. A lot of times for me political stuff has been about trying to fuse a political idea with something that I enjoy doing. If it doesn't work out, I'm like, I'll try something else. Or that worked out really good. Sacrificing yourself to some abstract idea is just going to burn you out. I have so many friends that got into politics and were really gung-ho about it, like "I'm going to change the world," then after two years of passing out fliers they're like, fuck this, nothing is happening. If you are not enjoying it…Well, I'm not saying we should just have a good time, I don't think that if the revolution is the way I see it coming, it's not going to be a whole lot of fun, but at the same time I think it's unnecessary to become Christian about it, if that makes sense.



THE DAMNED

An interview with Captain Sensible



Taken from *And God Created Punk*


Taken from *Hit Machine*

You were the first punk band to put out a single, and the first punk band to tour America, but you don't consider yourself a punk band?

I do, I do. I love what punk stands for, but punk became something different. It kind of became different around 1978, when the Exploited and UK Subs became a kind of standard sound. Real shouty, loud, tuneless kind of thing. The original bands like the Clash, Pistols, the Stranglers and the Damned all had some melodies, but punk became a non-melodic thing. I love Charlie and the UK Subs, but I couldn't actually play one of their records.

Did Nick Lowe seek you out for the first record?

No, he was managed by the same bloke as us, Jay Riviera. Nick's just a country twanger, a country artist. He was always in pub rock bands playing crappy easy listening country shit. He was chosen as our producer, which I think was inspired because he didn't know a thing about production. The Damned's first album, which is supposedly a classic, sounds obviously more dulled and lo-fi obviously because of the lack of production compared to the Pistols' *Never Mind...* which sounds classy. The drums and guitar are perfectly produced, and the Damned album sounds like we just went in and recorded it in a day and a half, which is in fact what happened.

You came from the tradition of the early 1970s prog rock.

Yes, I still like that stuff. It's still what I listen to all the time. I was in a record shop the other day, it's all a blur, in Tampa, there's a record store next to the state theatre, and they were playing this record, and I was like fucking hell, that sounds like Soft Machine, with a little bit of the Groundhogs thrown in. I said to the bloke behind the counter, what's that, and he says, it's a new American band called Zero Zero and the album is called *AM Gold*, and it's just a great, new, fresh sounding album. You know, I would like to speak to the band and ask them if they have any Soft Machine records, and I bet they bloody say no, we haven't, but they've discovered it the same way. Just by putting Farfisi organs through fuzz boxes and things like that. Yeah, I love progressive rock, but the five or ten percent that are good, not like Yes and Genesis, who were absolute dog shit. They gave the whole genre a bad name really.

What led you from that prog sound into the rather straight-ahead ideas of punk?

I knew something was going to happen, because in the mid-1970s, the music at the time was just so turgid, it really was Yes, Genesis, and Emerson, Lake, and Palmer, or it was disco, or the Osmonds, it was really bad and there was hardly anything good about it. Glam rock had kind of run its course and something had to happen, and when I met Brian James through an advertisement. I could see he had the vision to put something spectacular together, something I had never considered. He had this wild kind of gang mentality, a kick ass, blitzkrieg kind of noise that he had in his mind. I slept on his floor with Rat Scabies, we both slept on his floor, and he just played us non-stop New York Dolls. He taught us these manic songs and the whole thing I could see, because he was doing stuff that no one else was doing. And he just had these great ideas, so that's how I got involved with it.

When you met him were you playing guitar or bass?

I was playing guitar in two bands. One was the Johnny Moped group, who put out a reasonably good punk album themselves called *Psychodelic*. Is that an awful pun or what? And the other band I was in was actually a band called Oasis, and we'd go out and play working man's clubs doing Elvis Presley covers and things like that. I like remember telling them, you've got to change this name, because you'll never get anywhere with a name like that. I thought it was absolute shit, but it shows how wrong I was.

Were you listening to pub rock bands like Dr. Feelgood and Eddie and the Hot Rods?

Yeah, it was the only thing worth seeing really.

Like with the Clash and Buzzcocks, was the idea of punk crystallized by the Ramones show in 1976, or did you already know what you wanted by then?

We all turned up at the Ramones gig as we did at an Eddie and the Hot Rods gig, although it was never said, because the p word, punk, was never spoken. None of the bands said, we are forming punk bands, it's going to be a massive movement. We didn't know that any of us was doing anything similar, but then again, we all turned up at the Ramones gig. And I kept seeing the same faces, Steve Jones, Joe Strummer, Tony James, so you could tell there was something actually. There was a little underground scene, but it was always underground. It was just that we were at the right place and at the right time, and it did actually gel into a mainstream thing, whether people wanted it or not.

Did it surprise you when it jumped from small clubs like the Roxy, 100 Club, the Nashville, and others to really big venues like the Rainbow?

Yeah, because I always thought, and I still think, that people are going to realize that real music is made by genius musicians who can play a flurry of wonderful, perfectly formed notes like Eric Clapton or wankers like that. I honestly didn't think it would last much more than three or four weeks, so much so that when our first album came out, it had a picture on the front...Well, we turned out for the session for *Damned Damned Damned* and they had all these custard pies and cakes and shaving foam and shit like that and they smeared it all over our faces. But I didn't know it was going to happen. Now when I turned up, you got to understand, I thought this was the only album I was ever going to make. I didn't want my picture on that fucking album cover to be covered with shit, so my Auntie and Uncle in bloody Glasgow couldn't recognize me. I was absolutely furious. When I saw the picture they had chosen for the cover, I said no, right, so let's see what you got on the back then, on the back there's a picture of the band live on stage with my back turned to the camera. I couldn't believe it, so I got a little passport photograph and they stuck it on to where the monitor was on the stage so you could actually see a picture of my face.

Why did they put a picture of Eddie and the Hot Rods on the first 1,000 copies?

Well, that's typical Stiff records, instant collector's items. I think they fetched up a fair few for themselves and put them under their beds for their retirement. I think that's what it was, just a cheap scam.

Did they have the consent of the band?

I have no idea.

How did you get to America without even having your records released here?

Who knows, I have no idea. It was all done on a very low budget and we played CBGBs. I remember that cunt Patti Smith telling us

to get the fuck out of her dressing room. They had two shows on that night, we were supposed to clear our equipment out as quickly as we possibly could, behave ourselves, get out of there quickly so the next show could come in and Patti Smith and that guitarist bloke came in and said you limey assholes, get out of our dressing room. I thought, thank you very much, New York punk welcomes us. Then we went across to Los Angeles.

Where you played two shows?
Yeah. With Television. But Television pulled out of the gig, so we had to sleep on someone's floor in Los Angeles.

That was covered in the first issue of *Slash*. You guys were the big spread.
That's right. It was at this guy's house who was in a band called the Weirdos. We put together a hastily put together, mocked-up small show and we had to have a collection box at the door saying, if you want to help the Damned go back home, put some money in here, because we didn't even have the air fare home.

Why weren't the first three records released in America?
That's business chitchat, I'm just a guitarist.

Why do you think *Music for Pleasure* is the most overlooked Damned record?
Well, the mistake was that there was always an experimental streak running through this band. I don't think we have ever repeated ourselves. There's a theme running through, but I do think we try to do something different each time. So with the second album we thought, alright, we'd done the punk record with *Damned Damned Damned*, so let's get Syd Barret in, the crazy psychedelic genius to produce it. So the Pink Floyd people, of course, were embarrassed by the way they treated Syd Barrett, you know they had thrown him out of the band. He turned up at their gigs, but they wouldn't let him up on stage. So, of course they thought, if we could get Syd back in the studio, it might spark his creativity to be the great musician that he is. So they donated the Pink Floyd studio to the Damned with Syd Barrett producing, but we were sitting in there waiting for him. He's my fucking hero you know, I couldn't wait to meet him, and it was really going to happen. In through the door about five to six hours late walks the fucking drummer, Nick Mason. Nobody could believe it, we were like, what are you doing here? Because the current line up of Floyd was not exactly very popular in punk circles, because they were part of the dinosaur shit we were trying to get rid of. He was like, I'm your producer, Syd couldn't make it. Needless to say, the whole thing was a disaster. The whole band was splitting up, Nick Mason didn't know what the fuck he was doing with us, let alone mix it. We had a jam with him one day and he couldn't even bloody drum. He couldn't even play "Johnny Be Good." We asked him, and he said, "Johnny Be Good," what's that? It was a disaster.

How did you feel when Robert Plant and Marc Bolan would come by and see shows?
We absolutely loved Marc Bolan, we thought he was marvelous. Because he…Well, some people from the old guard understood that punk was just different, a little dangerous, compared to the idea that it was kicking them out of a job maybe. But some of them liked it, some didn't. Both of them thought it was fantastic. Bolan would come out to our shows, and in fact he asked us on tour with him. We went out and played twenty dates supporting T. Rex. It was fantastic, what a great bloke he was. He was getting fit and healthy, and wearing a tracksuit. While we were all eating greasy fry-ups, he was jogging around the café. We have another slice of cholesterol-ridden junk food, and Marc Bolan would jog past you. He was off the drink, off the drugs, and he had a car crash! Nice man. But Phil Collins said, "I've looked at this so-called punk phenomenon and I see nothing of any worth." What a wanker, so I never miss an opportunity to dis that scab.

Like Truman Capote once said that Jack Kerouac was a typist, not a writer. But would you have made *Machine Gun Etiquette* if you did not have the hiatus for over a year?
Maybe not. I think we went away to learn how to write songs. Because none of had ever done that kind of stuff before.

Being Scottish, do you agree that punks in Scotland were a bit more tough and hardcore because as he says, "That's all they had."
Maybe, It was much more of a fashion in London. You'd get people like the Bromley sect, who were just little rich kids. Bromley is a rich area of South London. All their parents had money, so they could afford to go down to Malcolm's shop and buy the 200 pound bondage suits. 200 pounds in those days…Imagine how much that is now. They are the only people who walk around wearing this punk fashion, while the rest of the country was going to thrift stores, buying shitty clothes, and tearing the sleeves off of 'em, sticking safety pins in and wearing bin liners and things like that. I identified with the working class side of it, being of that persuasion myself. There is a debate going on between the two sides of the historic aspect of punk, whether it was like the bands themselves that invented this phenomena, or whether it was Malcolm, Jamie Reid, and Bernie Rhodes, the kind of university types who were pulling the strings, which is led by Jon Savages' *England's Dreaming*, which is a ripe load of shit if you ask me, I much prefer Johnny Rotten's *No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs*.

Do you think the Damned were unfairly characterized as jokers, especially early on? If so, did it anger you?
Oh yeah. It did actually. Because I think there's as much serious comment in this band as in any of the others really, although we are reasonably theatrical on stage *(laughs)*. You know, Johnny Rotten is as theatrical as they come, a very nice bloke, but it was a great act he put on. Really terrific. When the Clash were going on about "No Elvis, Beatles, and Rolling Stones" it didn't stop them from buying their records.

Did you see them as hypocrites when they sang 1977 and were flipping through record stalls buying those records?
Yeah, at the time. Especially when you consider as well this punk thing that said we ain't gonna become a part of this stinking industry, we're going to turn it all upside down, all the horrible rock'n'roll lifestyle, all the cocaine, the groupies, and the big fat record company cigar bastards, we're going to tell all those people to fuck off. Then of course when the Damned signed to a small label, Stiff records, believing in what we were saying, what were the others doing? Singing to the biggest fucking fat cat labels they could possibly get their hands on. So that was another bit of hypocrisy, I thought blood hell. That said, small labels can rip you off in a way that big labels never can.

Is there coincidence between the Offspring covering the Damned's "Smash it Up" and the band being on Dexter's label Nitro?
Dexter likes us.

Did he seek you out?
Yeah.

Although the band has had a steady line up for five years, but apart from one rack on a Fat Wreck Chords compilation, why hasn't the band released anything?
During that time I had my own bands, and Dave as well, with the Phantom Chords, and we were doing the Damned as well. When the record company came along, suddenly we were like, that's right, we used to make albums…That's a good idea.

Did you have all the songs ready before you went to the studio?
Yeah. We wrote them before we entered the studio. For the first time since, God, did we ever go in with a full compliment of songs, I

don't think we ever did. A lot of times we just went in with three or four songs and wrote the rest in the studio, and all the chaos and shouting matches and punch ups that entails. My song is better than yours, you fucking cunt, and all that sorta shit. We went off and wrote a bunch of songs over a couple of months, and put our ideas together.

Are you surprised that the first run has already sold out?

Well yeah, because they didn't print enough. I don't know how much, but obviously not enough if it is sold out. There's some good tunes on there, I think it's a quality record, a little musical adventure. I don't hear many records I like, I mean I do buy quite a lot of records, but this record has quality. There's not too many filler tracks in it. I like records like that, because when I buy a record and it's only got two to three good tracks on it, the rest of it is such a disappointment, like the New Radicals. I bought that and there's like two good songs on it. But the single is sensational.

Could you explain to an American audience the difference between the labor government of the1970s in England, and the current labor government?

The labor government of the 1970s was more socialist, now I think all the political parties in the Western countries have realized that there's only one option for them, unfortunately, which is like market capitalism, which is like groveling and scraping to the world banks and the IMF and people like that. This is why our song "Democracy?" has a question mark after it, because there's isn't really much choice between the labor party and the conservative wing. Somebody in the Conservative Party said that Tony Blair is the best conservative Prime Minister we've ever had. I mean really, that sums things up, doesn't it? And with Gore and Bush, there was not much choice between them really.

Has it surprised people in England how gung-ho Blair has been with the war on terrorism?

It doesn't surprise me in the slightest, because whatever this country says, England is your faithful loyal poodle. You say jump, we say how high? I've been reading and I think there is a kind of Anglo Saxon, English speaking peoples conspiracy, and once people are in the British government they realize their jobs as part of America and Britain is to go around bullying the rest of the world. Britain is a loyal ally that does whatever you say. To be honest, if you want an honest, decent world, you've got to treat people good, you shouldn't shit on whole countries the way the West is doing. The Palestinians should have a homeland, shouldn't they?

It's unfair that the Israelis have one, but not the Palestinians.

I wrote this song one time "A Holiday in My Heart." The phrase came from this Israeli film director who said that every time a British squady is killed in Palestine, there's a holiday in my heart. The song actually doesn't reflect that, but that's actually where I got the title from.

Is the Damned it for now, or will you be pursuing solo projects?

It's the only thing I can do, well, I was a fairly good toilet cleaner. So the council said when I handed in my resignation. They said we'll hold the job open for you, just in case this doesn't work out. That was very nice of them. But the only other thing I can do is goof around on stage, but if anyone ever has a whacky film project and wanted some incidental music, then I'm the man. Dave is into that as well. Dave's really into films, totally. I mean I don't dig the films, but I like the music.

When you think of good incidental music, who do you think of?

Ennio Morricone (the spaghetti westerns), John Barry (James Bond), and people like that. Then there's...What's that wanker's name...John Williams, who does terrible, bombastic overblown crap and gets away with it time after time. He did *Superman*, *Star Wars*, and shit like that. Disgusting. So I think they should get more interested in getting bands to do that sort of stuff, but unfortunately I think you have to talk the talk, kind of walk around wearing a suit and stuff, and I can't do that. But if there's any weirdoes out there making a film, we don't wear suits, but we produce atmospheric, meandering ambient music.

Would you guys consider putting out a record of ambient music?

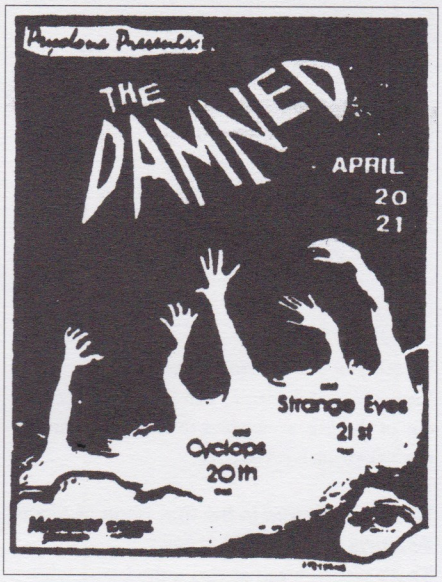
If a film happened, then yeah it would happen, because Dave would be so interested.

But even without a film?

I'd do it anyway. I have an album called *Meathead*, which is full of ambient, ten or fifteen minute excursions into the unknown. That didn't sell very many *(laughs)*. It was a double album, I filled both CDs full of music. Stuff that had been sitting on my shelf. It would have never seen the light of day, but it's out there sitting in the cheapy racks, if anyone is into that sort of thing.

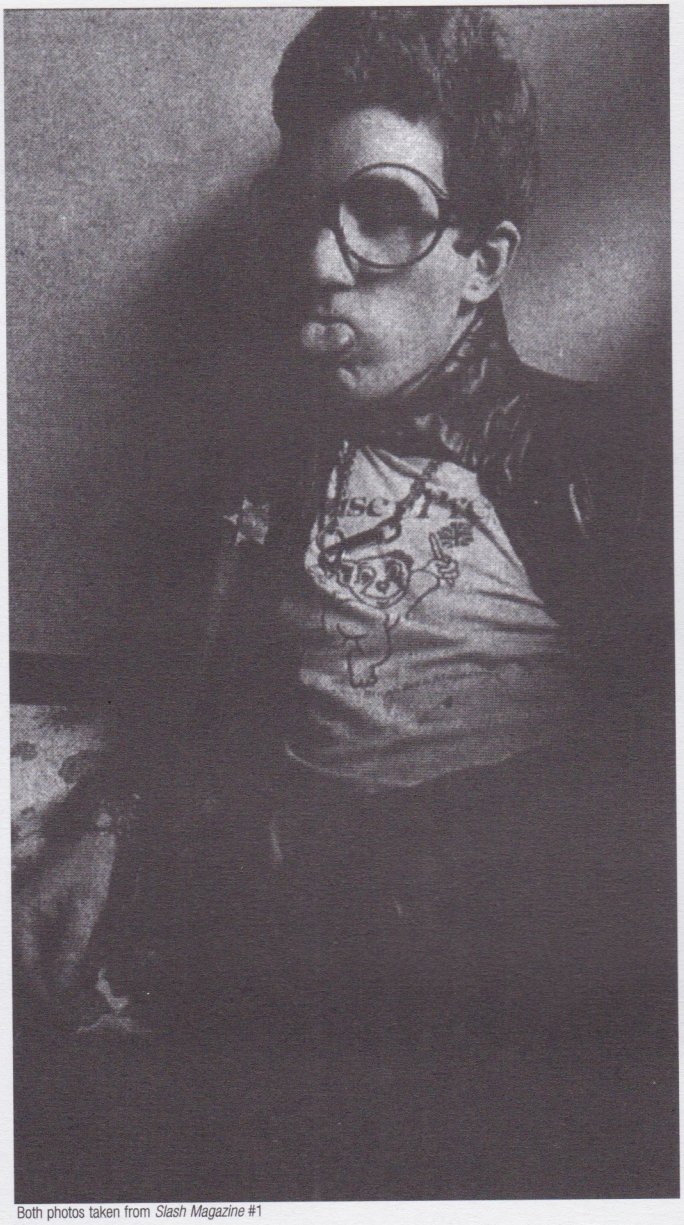
Who is someone you'd like to play with that you haven't so far?

I'd like to work with the guys from Talk Talk. They did a fantastic album this last time. It got them thrown off their label because it's so experimental, but it's the most beautiful album. Who else? I'm still into Terry Riley.



I fell off the stage in Salt Lake City and done my knee in. I was reaching out to grab a blue wig off a transvestite.







Both photos taken from *Slash Magazine* #1

Who are you listening to now that's inspiring?
That Zero Zero record. It's the best record I've had for years. Stereolab I like a lot, and Ladytron, and Spiritualized.

Mike Scott from the Waterboys mentioned how powerful the Spiritualized record was for him.
Brilliant music can move you to tears; it can change your entire mood for the day. I remember when I was going to school, and if I had a particularly grueling day ahead, I'd throw something terribly aggressive on the record player, and run off to school with a spring in my step. Music has immense power. Listen to Rachmaninoff's *Second Symphony*. That's the most amazing piece of music. It takes you on a journey. Or the middle movement in Ravel's piano concerto is outrageous, one of the best bits of music I have ever heard. It's sandwiched between these jazzy kinds of things because Ravel had this thing going on with Gershwin, they were trying to match each other for the swing jazz orchestral. The middle part of the piano is so outrageous because it's such a melancholic piece. My girlfriend and I listen to it and call it the twitch notes because of the out of tune notes he plays on the piano, but they are strategically placed and make you shudder.

Do you feel your generation was driven and invested in music more than the MTV generation?
I would imagine that the people in these bands are sort of driven. I mean, Noel Gallagher knows his stuff, mind you he's no spring chicken.

You are almost done with the US tour, then straight back to England?
Yeah, to the toilet tour of England. Back to basics. An English audience is a bit different than an American audience. It's kind of a mixed bag out here, there's the punk moshers, the oldsters, the youngsters, and down in front there's always three or four rows of pretty goth girls, which we don't get in England. All you get in Britain is straight in your face, ugly bastards with the Fuck Off and Die T-shirts and their fists up going, "You wankers, ah! Play faster." So, yes, the toilet tour is beckoning. On the tour this far at almost every show the crowd has got involved with shouting back and forth stupid, inane comments, and requests for goth songs. I fell off the stage in Salt Lake City and done my knee in. I was reaching out to grab a blue wig off a transvestite.

Were you going to wear it?
Oh yeah. I think Johnny Rotten was right, I'm not here to entertain you, you're here to entertain me. That's the way I see it. If the audience doesn't give something back, then the show doesn't take off.



a b c d e f g h

a. **Cursive**
Burst and Bloom LBJ-35 EP CD/12" released 7.23.2001

b. **Son, Ambulance**
Euphemystic LBJ-36 CD/LP released 9.11.2001

c. **The Faint**
Danse Macabre LBJ-37 CD/LP released 8.21.2001

d. **Now It's Overhead**
s/t LBJ-38 CD released 10.2.2001

e. **Sorry About Dresden**
The Convenience of Indecision LBJ-39 CD released 10.23.2001

f. **Azure Ray**
November EP LBJ-41 CD EP released 1.21.2002

g. **Desaparecidos**
Read Music/Speak Spanish LBJ-42 CD/LP released 2.11.2002

h. **The Good Life**
Black Out LBJ-43 CD/LP released 3.4.2002

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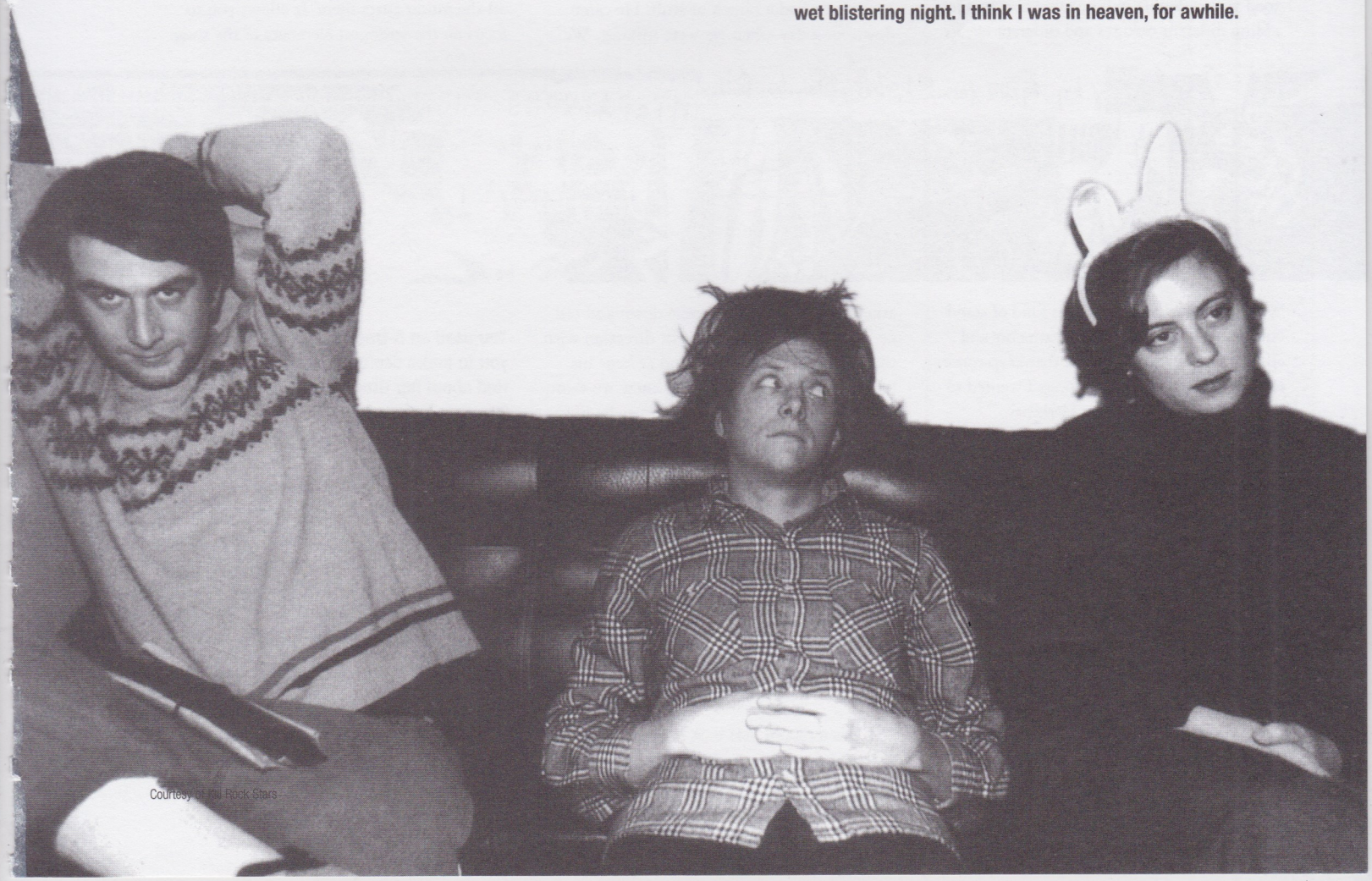
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Twin Guitars are the Jet Fuel of Poetry: A Talk with...

UNWOUND

When I saw the Unwound years ago at a bowling alley in Chicago, I had just pulled myself from the sticky black vinyl seats of the lounge and the slight grime of rum sat on my lips like rank gloss. They swayed half-conscious on the stage, which seemed to be nothing more than a bunch of 2x4s held together with duct tape. It was like Sonic Youth circa "Confusion is Sex," but without the New York art pretense. Later I ripped open a copy of *New Plastic Ideas* while working at a mall record shop in Carbondale, IL and never paid for it. While browsing through $1.00 cutout and scratched CDs at Kims on 8th street in New York, some guy behind the counter played *Repetition* and scoffed like I had a turd on my shoulder when I asked who it was. After this phone interview, the Unwound played Houston during a wet blistering night. I think I was in heaven, for awhile.



Courtesy of Kill Rock Stars

Did you originally envision *Leaves Turn Inside You* as a two record album?
Well, we always wanted to do one, but we weren't just going to go, "Well, we have to put out a double album, so let's just put a bunch of crap together." We kind of just let it happen, since we had a bunch of songs.

You built your own studio, so there weren't time constraints per se?
Well, we spent what money we would have spent at a professional studio. We still had a time thing, and there were a bunch of deadlines. But yeah, we had much more time to make decisions and sort of think about the songs.

On earlier records, you basically recorded within a few days, so the songs were ready beforehand and felt fairly live when recorded. But is it true that many of the songs on this record were built in the studio?
Well, almost all of them had the basic structures, the chords of the guitars, the bass and the drums. That's how we write the songs. We just processed them all and added more instruments, and put in the kinds of songs we normally write and kind of filtered them and gave them a different treatment.

Are there versions of the songs with different instrumentation?
No, we kind of recorded the basic thing, listened to them a lot, and said, this would sound good with a double guitar. Some of it was just adding different textures and different effects.

Courtesy of Matt Tantillo



We just processed them all and added more instruments, and put in the kinds of songs we normally write and kind of filtered them and gave them a different treatment.

And how much input did Steve Fisk have?
He didn't do a lot. We went to his house for a couple days and recorded the keyboards because he had a bunch of stuff. He came down for a day when we were mixing. We asked, could you please come down and tell us if we are going in the right direction with this? Other than that, he kind of kept his hands out of it. He definitely knew we wanted to try it out ourselves. He'd just be like yeah, it seems like you know what you're doing.



We tried to make all the songs kind of stand out, and tried just different treatments and effects. There are also threads that keep coming together. With a lot of the songs I wanted to piece together the different elements...

And give it an organic sense, a sense of a whole?
Yeah. The last song on the album is a variation of the first song.

It almost feels like a series of short stories tied together, each with a mood and characters.
Yeah, it kind of ended up that way, but we didn't set out that way. A lot of the lyrics I tried to write more straight forward. I think they are still fairly abstract. Some of the songs are in the form of letters...I was just trying to diversify a little.

You've said that you learned more from his intuitive side than his encyclopedic brain side.
He just understands where to go with a song, and he has all the references to give you the technical mumbo jumbo. I think anybody's strongest trait would be whether or not they have intuition and go with that. Like, I can't tell you why, but...

Was this a record that took ten years to make?
This is definitely a product of ten years worth of work, of building chemistry, and trusting each other's opinions and intuitions. And also of being selfless, like, yeah, I really don't need all the guitar parts there. It allows you to focus on the strongest elements of the song.

You used an 8-track board, which forces you to make decisions, and Sarah was worried about her drum sound.
There are definitely limitations. We knew it was going to be lower fidelity than our other records, but I was like, we should just try and make the highest fidelity record we can or the most interesting sonically that we can do with what we have within the framework, whereas as in a big studio you have 24 tracks. We traded that for as much as we want, but limited technology. We had people help us to engineer it, but it was a pretty big effort for us to do.

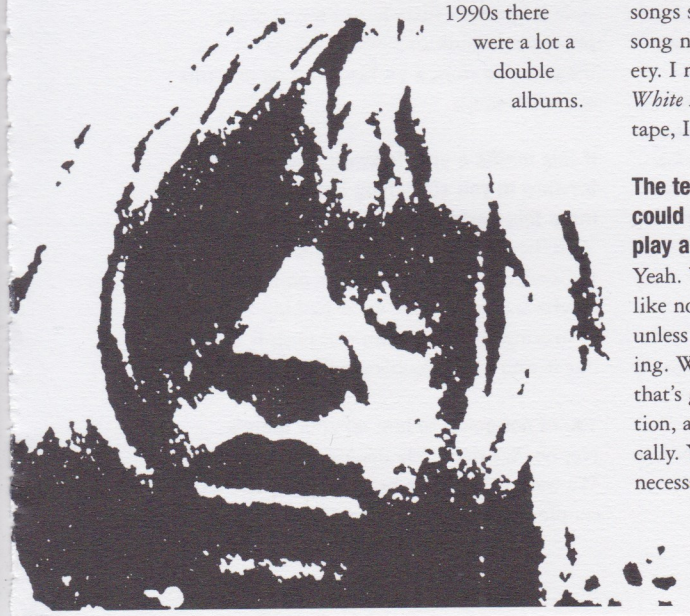
So other bands on Kill Rock Stars have already begun to use the studio?
Instead of just reaping all the benefits from

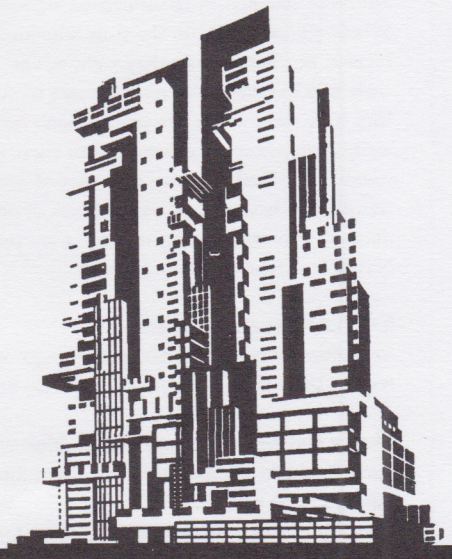
the success we've had, we tried to help out on some level and continue the process for others, whether it's hire all your friends that are in other bands to be on the road crew, or whatever, you know.

Does this have to do with being more impressed with the D.C. scene than with the faceless Seattle rock star scene while growing up?
Yeah, most definitely. The DC scene that was happening with Fugazi and Nation of Ulysses was an inspiration, and people in Olympia were inspired by Dischord, though not much musically. In high school, we were paying attention to a few bands in Seattle, but after awhile, it was all just people on a stepladder. Though a lot of the people who were in those bigger bands were in hardcore bands, and were actually cool people. But there was inspiring bands like the Melvins who just played and played, and kept going because they were so into their music. They got dropped by their label, but that didn't stop them. It didn't matter. The music was more important.

Did the label balk at the idea of a double CD?
No. I think that Kill Rock Stars was pretty psyched about having a double, though a double record is harder to sell…

When you think of double records, what comes to mind?
The White Album, Daydream Nation, Zen Arcade. Those are all albums that work as double albums, or *London Calling*. There are some really good double albums. I think in the 1990s there were a lot a double albums.





I guess with the new record I wanted a little visual stimulus outside of the record. I just wanted the art to be very minimal and not give away anything. Just black. Whereas almost all of our other records have certain visual themes, like technology.

Like for instance, some hip-hop albums are really long. It wasn't like, we have all these songs so let's throw them on, because each song needs to be part of the interesting variety. I mean, I don't like every song on the *White Album*. In fact if I was making a mixed tape, I might omit some of it.

The test used to be whether or not you could put the needle down anywhere and play a song and still be interested…
Yeah. We were trying hard not to make filler, like not have a five minute noise section unless it fits in the context of what's happening. With the songs that are long, there's stuff that's going on, like the extra instrumentation, and should make sense lyrically or sonically. You try to keep things progressing, not necessarily make sure that everything has a meaning, but that it makes sense or there is a reason for that keyboard part, not just to add a keyboard part because the song is boring. But add it because that's what should happen.

How important are visuals to the band?
Because I collect records, sometimes when I am out shopping I am drawn to connect with the looks of records. I want our records to stand out in the bin, but also I want the look to make sense with the music, not exactly accompany it, but just not clash with it. I guess with the new record I wanted a little visual stimulus outside of the record. I just wanted the art to be very minimal and not give away anything. Just black. Whereas almost all of our other records have certain visual themes, like technology.

Like the *Future of What*?
Exactly. Even the titles really have a lot more in common with the record, which is less a projected view of the world, and more the inside of your head. I wanted to have something that wasn't commenting on what is happening in the world.

I've heard in making the record you were influenced by the Kinks. I imagine it was *The Village Green Preservation Society* period.
Well, that's a cool record. I mean, I like all of them. But it's all about the stories...I was definitely influenced by English bands writing songs about eccentric characters and people, not necessarily drug influenced, because the era lends itself to a kind of surrealism, but more like non-drug influenced weirdos. People you see going to the store who are bizarre, but not because they went out of their way to take drugs and cultivate it. And they have some weird life story. I don't necessarily write those songs myself, but those are songs that I kind of thrive on. A lot of records just have great ideas in terms of production. I mean our song structures are totally different than all that.

But there's shared elements.
Yeah, but we're not a retro band, though we try and grab some influences from every era.

I know you were reading Philip K. Dick and Jerry Kozinski awhile back. Did any authors influence the new record?
Well, there was a little Philip K. Dick thinking going on with the last record. Actually, I was reading William Faulkner.

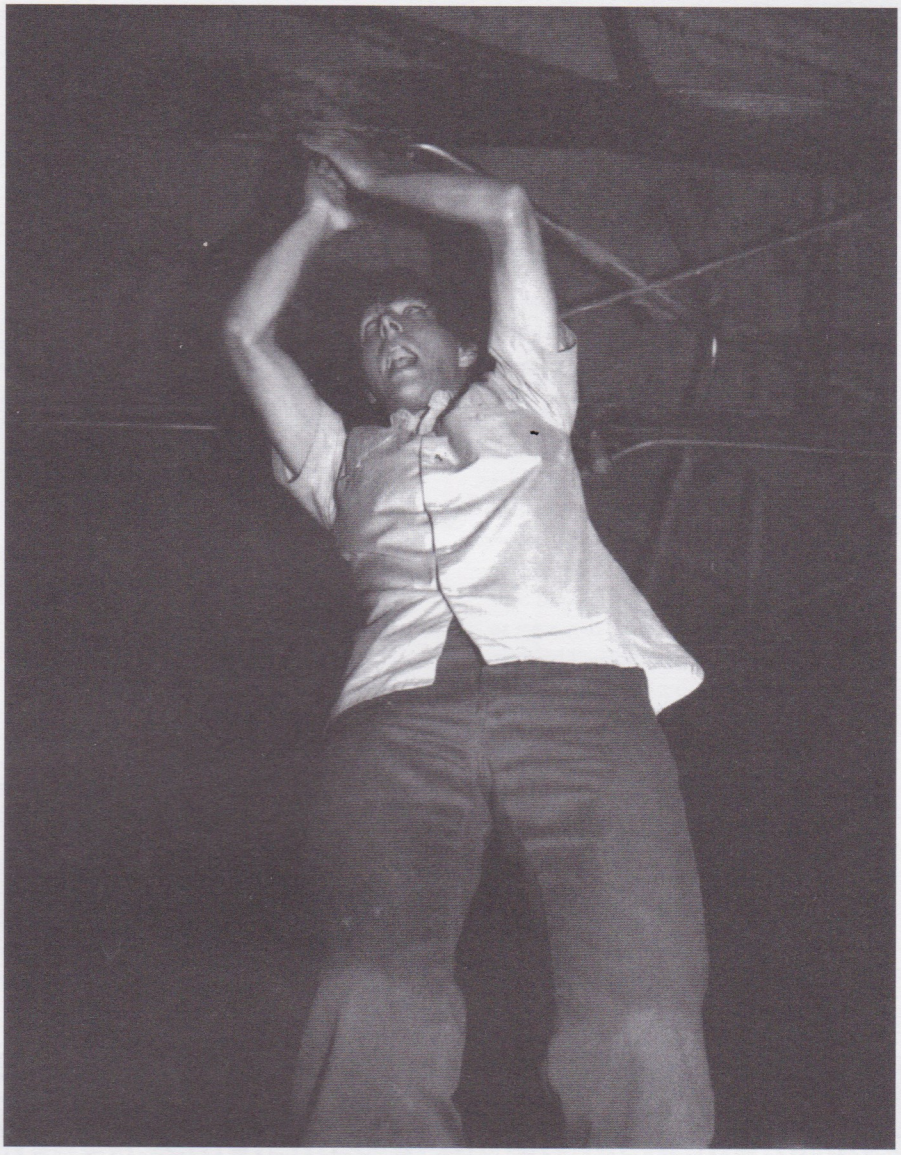
No wonder the record is a bit dark.
I've just started reading a book about the letter E, and Will Self and John Carroll.

After ten years is it hard to have the same spontaneity and challenge of playing shows in bowling alleys and basements like you did in the past?
On some level. There's only so much tolerance you can have, like well, we've done this before. I mean, I don't want everything to be homogenized or boring...

Prepackaged?
Like, we played, we got our money, and then we split. It's fun to have weird things happen and different audiences, but we don't get a lot of weird audiences, crowds are a bit passive, and I don't mean that in a bad way, because they do pay attention to the band. Whatever happens is fine.

But do you miss the element of the unknown?
But that is still happening. We also pick out the bands that play with us.

Courtesy of Matt Tantillo



You like Greg Sage, Tom Verlaine and others because they are guitar heroes, interesting people, or what?
There's a little bit of the hero thing. I don't know any of them, but the individual sound is great, and they are outstanding individual players who were also in great bands. They have their individual tone and a way that they play. And they are self-taught. I think that a lot of the great musicians are self-taught. That's how they get their original style. I used to want to emulate them, but as I've grown more proficient or more comfortable with myself as a guitar player, I'm less concerned with things like, why can't I be more like these people?

Like I am so small compared to Helios Creed *(laughs)*.
I still do listen to their stuff, and am inspired by it.

What's the thing you're least looking forward to during the next six months?
Well, I don't want to burn out on the songs, because that could happen. The thing I want to have is a high energy level and focus, and not to get bogged down by stupid things that make me feel trapped. On tour, we're bringing along another guitar player and a keyboard player, it has much more structure, so it might be a little less in terms of surprise, but I think in terms of where we're at it's going to work a lot better for us in terms of certain songs.

If this marks a step forward, can we look forward to you stretching boundaries even more this next year?
Yeah, hopefully we'll have a different sound. I'm not sure what wave we are on now, maybe our fourth, but we're looking forward to making another album and push it farther, but it won't be a double album.

You're not going to rest on your laurels.
No, no. We definitely don't want to do that. We want to keep the ball rolling. There are a couple of directions we could take.



Taken from *UK Subs: Peel Sessions 1978–1979*

U.K. SUBS

an interview with CHARLIE HARPER

In 1985, I flew into New York with my sister and watched the city unravel in the million fold glitter of glaring windows wedged between the murky Meadowlands and the black hole of the Atlantic ocean. We took a cab into Manhattan and stared in awe at the dirty corners and relentless inhuman blocks as the Jamaican cab driver blasted some heavy dub. My brother lived in a basement apartment in the Lower East Side, where the whole hall shared one bathroom and mice darted in and out between the foam mattress. I sat around and taped Government Issue and Joy Division records deep into the a.m., ate cheap Chinese food, drank orange juice as my sister smoked marijuana that was laced and made her sick, shied away from skinheads in Token Entry T-shirts loudmouthing around a Tompkins Square pizzeria, and watched as a Puerto Rican skateboarder with L.L. Cool J songs webbed in his brain called the fire department on an art punk roof party. One afternoon I stopped by a tiny cramped record store staffed by a dude with wily dyed black hair and flipped through the bins, eager to spread my cash on the counter for the first Youth of Today LP, and Discharge and U.K. Subs best of compilations. As soon as I heard "Stranglehold," "Party in Paris," "Telephone Numbers," and every other slightly pop tinged hunk of Charlie Harper's soul side, I saw the street-minded second wave of Brit Punk open up and turn my world upside down. When I saw the Subs last fall, Charlie was the feistiest mid-50s man I have ever seen grapple a mic and launch himself full-on into combat songs, but also the most quiet, teddy bearish, and kind mannered person I have ever interviewed. And when the boys whipped into "C.O.D." the whole buildng shaked like someone had kicked all the support poles at one time with giant dirty boots. That's the power and the glory of the Subs to this day, over 20 years since they pogoed their way into the hearts of ten thousand kids.



The UK Subs just played Brazil. Was that the first time they played South America?

We actually played in Argentina twice. That was quite a trip. One time we were called there because the biggest Argentine punk rock band were breaking up and they requested that the UK Subs come out there and party with them. It was great. The actual singer was Irish-Argentinian. He didn't speak hardly any English, but he was a complete Irishman in the way that he drinks. He was like a mess, but a brilliant guy. Most people kind of tolerated him. I thought he was brilliant because he was just this drunken mess, a bit like an Argentine equivalent of the guy from the Pogues.

Shane MacGowan?

Yeah. Exactly. Except this Argentinian is worse. We'd go to this place for dinner at night and he'd fall asleep in his soup. His hair was caked in gunk. He was a legend out there. The strongest place in South America that he is most popular in, where he has sold the most records, is Bolivia, a country west of Argentina. So he moved there, because he's big in Bolivia. They're not just the biggest punk rock band in Bolivia, they're like the biggest band in Bolivia. And he has the most amazing Bolivian girlfriend.

So how was South America this last time?

It was incredible in one sense, but a bit of a letdown in another sense. After our manager kind of winded us up to think it was a going to be a great tour, two of the shows fell through. So we only ended up doing four, maybe five shows. The first show was in a very small club, not even the size of this little club here (Fitzgeralds in Houston). Half the size, which wasn't bad, because we do that kind of club in England all the time. There was a kind of shortage of beer *(laughs)*. We had to beg to get a beer. In the end, we got a case of beer. We flew over to Argentina to do the Buenos Aires show. That was in a big old cold place called Club Concrete. That was a typical South American thing where a fight broke out between the right and left wing. The so-called skinheads and the left attacked each other half way through the show. It kind of spoiled the whole evening. Everyone went home as quickly as they could. Again, we had to beg the promoter for some beer, like please give us some beer. Actually, Argentine beer is really the best, it's really great beer. They've got, well I can't remember what it is, something like Planet Beer, and it's got a blue label. We went back to Sao Paulo, where we were based. It's quite a neat city. We were quite surprised. It's like a few cities, like a wide Manhattan. There's like a hill, then another city on top of the hill, then another hill, and another city. It's got like five cities. That's why it's so big, isn't it? 15 million or something like that. You get these coconuts, these big royal coconuts everywhere, for like less than one of their dollars. So you start drinking this coconut juice, and it's like a cheap dinner that's really great. Then we played San Paulo, and it was a great gig. We meant to do two shows, but they cancelled Friday night, so we did Saturday night. I said, if anyone is shut out, I'm going to kill you. Maybe only thirty were, but a lot of people said they would have gone both nights. It's the first time we ever played in San Paulo. Then everyone said there's a punk kind of following in Rio, but it's all sand and tourists, so it's not a big one. It was in this big concrete arena, which was not so much like a squat, but like a relic from the 1950s. It poured down rain all day and half the night, so when we came on stage you see the place is soaked with puddles, and only about 400-500 kids showed up. I said to them, why don't you move it into the bar? They didn't. It was just grim, with this big outside scaffolding like an arena. The place could hold a couple thousand kids, and only 400-500 showed up. It was really pathetic. So the tour was kind of a mixed thing, but at the end of the whole thing, one of the promoters was from San Paulo and a great, great guy, and the other guy was some German, and he heard that I liked the fish, so they took us to this place in Brazil that was a little fishing village. Pretty notable people go their for holiday, like Elton John and Mick Jagger, where they get out somewhere and no one will take notice of them because there is no rock'n'roll in the town at all. Outside the town is just jungle. There are all these fishing boats, so they hired one from a Swiss guy who was staying there. We went fishing for three days, and had the absolute time of our lives. The drinks out there are almost poisonous they are so strong. On the first day, we over-stepped our mark a little bit *(laughs)*. After that, we stuck to beer. Their cocktails are lethal. They crush lemons down, but instead of having a cocktail shaker, they'll have a big orange jar, then they'll stick about a half-pound of sugar and about six limes chopped up and then add this lethal juice. They then chomp it all down with this stick, and mash it all up, then shove a box of lemonade into it, but it's still lethal.

You guys have always been trailblazers, like being the first punk band to play in Poland, behind the former Iron Curtain. Was it an accident that you ended up playing there in front of thousands of people?

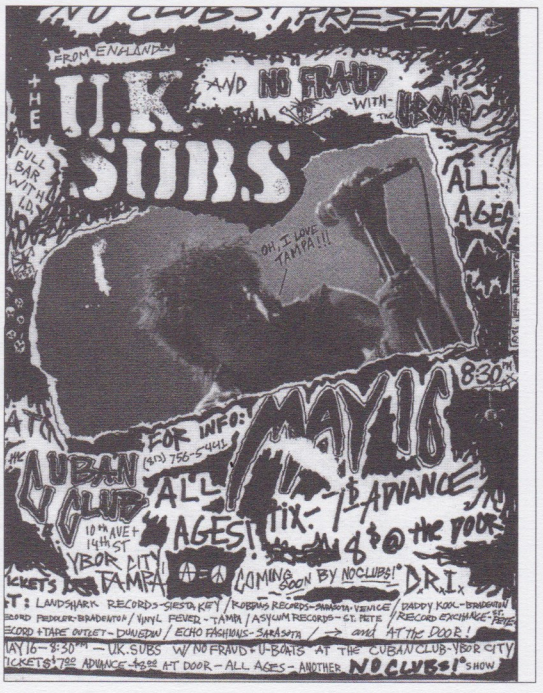
Well, not really. It was like a government thing, well, obviously it was done by a big agency in Poland. It was kind of a propaganda thing, because Lech Walesa was in jail at the time, the Solidarity leader who would later become president. He was in jail, and they thought they'd get these concerts over, like Elton John went over first for the pop fans, then we did it for the underground. It was a kind of heroin for the people kind of thing, but the country was still quite divided. It was on the brink of civil war.

Did you see Soviet troops?

Not Soviet troops, but Polish troops were always at our concerts, with machine guns. Instead of having bouncers, there were like thirty of forty troops there. The smallest concert we did was 4,000 people, and the biggest were two shows of 12,000 people. We played to 25,000 people that night. They were these big shows in ice hockey arenas. The troops were there.

Do you feel that you connected with the kids?

Oh yeah, oh yeah. We'd speak to them before or after. It wasn't until after that, maybe five years later, that they'd tear you to pieces just trying to get a bit of clothing or hair or something. We've been out there a few times. It's still very divisive. It almost feels that the whole of Poland is just Nazis except for these kids. You'll see these Nazi skinheads, which we haven't seen much of lately, but it was very bad out there. It seems like the whole country is fascist except for the Poles who escaped over to England or America, because you've got millions over here. It's like all the good ones escaped.



Was it your parents who fled the Spanish Civil War?
My grandparents.

Is that what influenced your politics, or did you learn politics on the street?
Not really, because my uncle grew up to be a communist, and that was always frowned upon back then.

A communist or Trotskyite?
A member of the Communist Party. He was a bit talked about and admired. Family politics was straight down the line democrat, I suppose, but democratic means a different thing in America. It's kind of right wing, but in England it just means democracy, or left wing socialism.

As a kid in the mod scene, you used to see Rod Stewart busking on the corner?
We were buskers. We were friends and buskers together.

How did you get from there to punk rock?
(laughs) We still do one of my favorite busking songs, which is an old American folk song called "Bottle of Wine." It's an old hobo song.

From the 1930s?
"Bottle of wine…When are you gonna let me get sober?" I think it goes back even further, because if it were from the 30s, then they would know who wrote it, so it probably goes back past even the turn of the century.

You can hear that influence on records like *Another Kind of Blues* with the harmonica and soulful singing.
It's not done purposely by any means, because when Nicky came along he said, you've got to drop all this rock'n'roll shit. But that's part of me, you know what I mean? I can't burn out of it. I tell you how it comes out, because Nicky will come up with a hell of a lot music for a song, then I'll say look, this bit is neat, you don't want to just pass it by. This bit could be the verse, or between the chorus it needs to be played eight times over. That's my kind of blues, r&b upbringing. We do everything in eight bars, twelve bars, or four bars. We repeat, we don't just go across one bit of music. I just think that it's too good just to throw away. I do come from the '60s, twelve-bar thing, where you do something for twelve bars, or say you do a riff, then sing a line, and then play again. I repeat that in a few songs, not enough, but I like the way you do a little riff then sing a bit. For anybody who plays guitar out there, and you have to sing and play guitar, it's very easy, because I used to sing and play bass. You just sing on straight, then you do a kind of riff, then sing on the next bit.

Do you think bands like the 101ers and Eddie and the Hot Rods were the bridge between the r&b sounds of pub rock and punk rock?
When the Hot Rods came up it was slightly different than pub rock. That was the South End. The South End of what? The South End of the county they were in. There was this great place by the sea, and all these great bands came out of there in the 1970s, like Eddie and the Hot Rods and Dr. Feelgood (singer Lee Brilleaux, guitarist Wilko Johnson). Lovely great bands came from the South End, like they'd had that Manchester explosion with Oasis. Sometimes you get this nest of great bands. They went more towards punk than the pub rock thing did. The pub rock thing was almost country. You know the song "American Pie"? It's got piano and guitar in it, and well that's pure pub rock. Maybe that's why it was so big in England. It was pure pub rock.



How would you define pub rock?
Out here in America it's called trucking music, it's kind of got the r&b and country sound, and it's strong and powerful. It drives along, like for guys on the road for ten days.

On trucker speed.
(laughs) Trucker music. That's what it was.

Why did you guys always get lumped in with bands like Angelic Upstarts and Cockney Rejects?
Well, they came out a bit later than us. Let's take it right back from Velvet Underground and Hollywood Brats and New York Dolls. When punk rock came out, we all got our inspiration from those bands, but we took it a bit harder, a little more bitchin and spiteful, as it were. Then that launched the Sex Pistols, the Clash were very political, and Siouxsie made beautiful kind of music, the Jam went right back to the mod days and had the '60s feel, the Damned more into the glam side, then our generation came along, like the Subs, Buzzcocks, Sham 69 and had a tougher line. Then the bands you just mentioned went a bit more strong, more punk, more virile, and then after that came Exploited, Discharge, and Crass. It got very hardcore.

Did it bother you to see hardcore take over?
It's great to see these changes in the music and wonder what is going to happen next. Now we've got old school, new school *(laughs)*.

You've said that punk is just like blues and jazz, it will continually change.
Yeah, yeah. Like jazz will be, or blues will be. Some artist will come out, like some black artist came out and could actually write very good, and came out with a nice Fender guitar style, and took it right back there to Robert Johnson, but then everybody started copying this guy. Over here, Nirvana came out, and every band started sounding like Nirvana. So it does have its kind of good side and down side. Instead of bands coming out with something different, they just jump on the bandwagon, like hey, Nirvana just sold a million records, and we want to do this.

But it is surprising that songs like "Stranglehold" didn't sell a million copies, because it's basically a pop song, and not essentially any rougher or harder than a Green Day song, except they happened…
Twenty years later. Our songs are written almost out of necessity, which is a shame, but you need some songs for a set and we write these songs in like five minutes. They're not written with any thought, it's just sheer…Well, before the UK Subs I was in a band called the Subs a year before the UK Subs in 1976, and we were still playing a lot of Chuck Berry songs. The Sex Pistols even played Chuck Berry songs. We were by the bar and people were leaving the pub afterwards and they'd be singing "Stranglehold," and I turned to my mate and said, they're singing "Strangehold", not "Johnny Be Good" or "Roll Over Beethoven", they're singing our song. I still remember *(laughs)* the chill running down my back thinking,

they're singing our songs, not these great standards. I thought we're in with the chumps there, that's the way to go. Then I wrote "Party in Paris" and "Tomorrow's Girl". I do suspect there are some good pop songs. With "Party in Paris", for instance, I sometimes pick up the bass and play without thinking sometimes. Suddenly I listen to what I'm playing and think, that's not too bad. And I'll go and make a riff out of it, and surprise myself with it. When I wrote "Party in Paris" I said, I wrote this song, but it sounds very poppy, but the band didn't hear it that way.

When Nick put the guitar to it?

Well, I played it on guitar for them. But they didn't hear it as a kind of pop song. What I'm trying to say, when you write something down it surprises you when it becomes popular. I never think it will. We never go out of our way and say, let's write something that will be popular. It's more like, let's write a skate song because half of us skate, so let's write a silly little skate song because it makes us happy. Even that song, even though it was never released as a single, became the most poppy song on that album. We did it live in France one time and then forgot about it, but the next time we went to France it was shown on TV. They had done a little video of it. But this studio was so poor, so they couldn't do it with four or five cameras, they'd do me with one camera, then the drummer with one camera, over and over again and so on, then do the whole band, then cut it. But they were used to doing this, so they were masters of cutting, and when they put it together again it was amazing. Every time we went to France after that and did "Skate Tough" everyone would go crazy. We had a hit out there without knowing it. Those things are kind of nice.

Is it interesting how different songs become big in different places?

Yeah, we had one in LA where this very high regarded DJ who was originally from New York and he didn't sell out, he'd just play all underground all the time. He got one of our singles, one of which I thought I wrote a particularly good song, but no one else did *(laughs)*. The song was called "Another Typical City". I had gone to see Flipper or someone and the guy really flipped off the audience and said, "You're just another typical city involved in typical daydream." He bitched at the audience for not jumping around. I thought, that's good, that's a line that should not be wasted, so I wrote this song. It was done in what I call an almost bastardized disco kind of thing, and it came out on a single with a few other songs, but this DJ picked up on "Another Typical City" and just played it all the time. And when we came to LA, suddenly we were playing to six thousand people, and that was great because I always imagined something like that happening. Too bad we didn't get any financial gain out of it, because it was great when you come and you've a got a hit in a town, and that town happens to be Los Angeles. For four or five years we were playing big shows in Los Angeles.

In fact, you've said that touring America is basically a money losing proposition?

But it is a lovely place to go. People do pay to come here, and we get paid to come here. We only just manage to bring our rent money back home. *We don't come here for* the money. It's just that we have a great time when we are here.

You don't do it for the glamour, or the bus over my shoulder (Government Mule was playing upstairs).

(laughs), They can keep that bus, it doesn't hold any romance. I've done three US tours in RVs, which is kind of okay. But now we just have this people carrier, this van, we've got room for the four of us and the T-shirt girl when she gets fed up with the other band. We just like to get there fast. We were late for a show down in Tampa, and we had to come from Baltimore. We had two days to do it but we were going 100 miles per hour. It can really cruise at that speed *(laughs)*.

It doesn't shudder?

No, it's amazing. I think it's a Chevy. We had the same size kind of thing last year. They're way over weight We've loaded them up with all the equipment, we have one those, what do you call 'em, Ampegs, with the head in there as well. They are way over weight.

(Nicky walks over and gives Charlie his drink tickets)

You see, these are almost white, but sometimes there's blue, but some of the bar staff don't see the color of the ticket, and you save any tickets you got off anybody, and you can give them a red ticket wherever you were issued a blue ticket and always get a beer *(laughs)*. Nicky doesn't drink. He's a straight edge kind of guy. He just drinks fruit juice and carrot juice, so he gives me his tickets at the end of the night. So I end up with all these tickets, and I can get drunk off of twenty tickets *(laughs)*.

A few years ago you had a Strangler and a Vibrator living with you? What was that like?

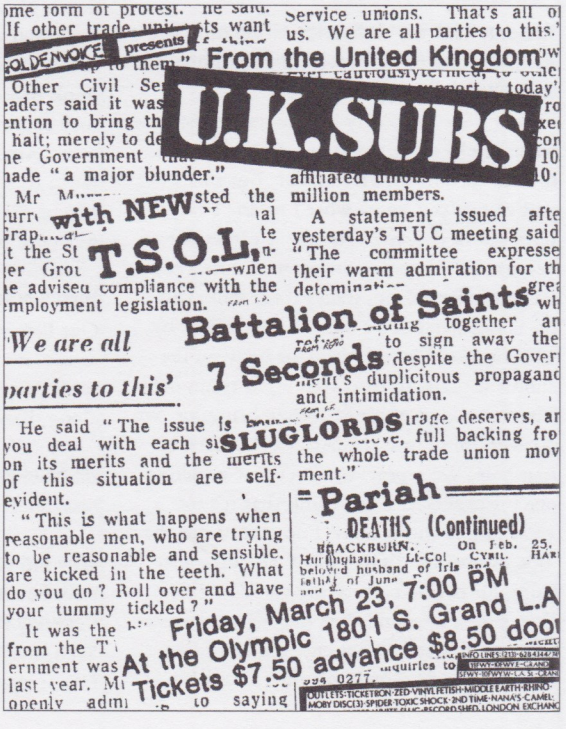
Yeah. Well, the drummer is still actually my landlord, Eddie from the Vibrators. Knox is one of my best buddies as well, and he's from the Vibrators. We are very close. Actually, it's Eddie's wife that makes our T-shirts back in England. John Ellis (Vibrators) is not so much a friend, but he's just a really nice guy.

Would you have a band with all of you together?

No, Eddie plays in a lot of blues combos when he's not playing with the Vibrators. And John is just now getting a blues outfit together, and I said, can I play harmonica? *But he's got this German guy playing harmonica.* Quite honestly, we don't get the time. Me and Knox got a band called the Urban Dogs together, but we struggle to find time to get things moving in that direction. We're always doing little bits of recording, but disregard 9/10s of it.

Do you ever speak to the guys from Stiff Little Fingers or the Buzzcocks, who still tour just like the Subs?

I've got a lot of time for Pete Shelley and Steve Diggle. I don't know if you've checked it out, but Steve Diggle looks like the twin of Alvin Gibbs, the Subs' bass player. Alvin used to really hate Steve Diggle, because every time he went up to Steve Diggle to say hi, and Steve Diggle knows who he is, but just blanks him and turns his back. He says, why does he do that Charlie? I say if everyone comes up to you and goes, hey Steve, c'mon I'll buy you a drink, and Alvin makes out that he's Steve Diggle and takes this guy's drink and at the end of the night says, by the way, I'm Alvin from the UK Subs…Well, the Buzzcocks are on a rung a bit higher than us.



When we play to 300 hundred, they'll play to three thousand. It must be okay for you, I told Alvin, but everyone must be padding Steve on the back and saying you're Alvin Gibbs and that must really bring him down *(laughs)*! But he didn't quite see it that way. Pete Shelley is a great mate and great person. I heard a funny story about Pete Shelley. He ran off with a young girl or something, because he had this Japanese girlfriend in London, but he's run off somewhere, I think it's South America to live in Rio or some place. When we were down there we heard these things *(laughs)*.

Do you guys still get any checks from the cover by Guns and Roses?

Not any more, it was ten years ago. But we'd just like to thank the guys and if they want any more songs, let us know! Actually, I've written a song for Axl Rose. Well, my last girlfriend, who was Italian, was crazy about Guns and Roses. She kind of stalked me after seeing us in Italy. She was very young then, about 17. After talking to me, she decided she wanted to go to the University of London and study and track us down. And she did when she was 19. She's a great girl, Lulu, but she's crazy about Guns and Roses, so that's the connection. I wrote this really great song. She's a little bit of musician, she plays fiddle, and she'd like to play bass and guitar. She's got a bass and I used to try and teach her, but she's a university student studying ancient Greek archeology. She's very busy, and has a night job as a bouncer. She's a pretty little skinny girl with tattoos. I wrote this song for her. She always wanted a steel guitar, but they costs thousands of dollars, so I wrote, "One day girl you'll have your steel guitar." It's a kind of a folksy ballad, but it's brilliant, and maybe Axl Rose will get to hear this from your fanzine and turn this song into a hit song. It's almost written for him. It's about this girl wishing for this steel guitar, then one day getting it, like a quest.

Is there one thing you wished you would have done over the last twenty years that you haven't?

Not really. My big thing in life away from the band is fishing. One day I would love to have a fishing boat of my own, just a little fishing boat. There's great fishing along the English coast. You get all kinds, and if you want to go out there and get shark you can. But my main target species is a beautiful fish called Sea Bass, a lovely white silver thing that gives a bit of a fight. I never normally kill them. I return them safe and sound with a mark, not even bleeding. Another thing is, I am very fish friendly, because I rarely catch anything. But I have got a Japanese girlfriend at the moment, and you know how the Japanese are with their sushi and fresh fish. If she gets a hold of anything, she's butchering it straight away. So that's a thing I've got to look forward to. I really don't have any regrets because although we've had a tough touring regime and its kind of split up a lot of relationships and things, the band's always come first, and I've had a great life doing this.

And you are a grandfather?

I'm a grandfather. Like Nicky said, he's 45 now, and he'd like to marry and settle down, but I've had that life, it's there in the back for me. I have three grandchildren now. I'm in these shops around the country, you know the garage shops, picking up these 3 for 10 bucks T-shirts getting my little granddaughter these little shirts with sharks on them. Indoctrinating these kids with fishes on their shirts *(laughs)*.



Do they know their grandfather has 17 records behind him?

Not really, the oldest one is five. They know I kind of like fishing, but the first thing the oldest one wanted for Christmas was a microphone. The younger boy got a set of drums last Christmas. They both get on the drums and they're both very serious with their tongues out, concentrating. The music thing didn't skip a generation, because both my kids had a lot of talent. One of them ended up being a rave DJ, and he could have easily been a drummer or a singer for a band. They are kind of musical. But I think my ex-wife ran it into them, like your dad will never get anywhere, so they've always been a bit afraid to go there. So I think the grandkids might have a bit more courage and talent. I wanted my kids to be soccer players. I wanted them to play for England. I taught them to play soccer before they could walk, and by the time they were five they could kick a ball properly. They still play today, but only as an amateur kind of thing.

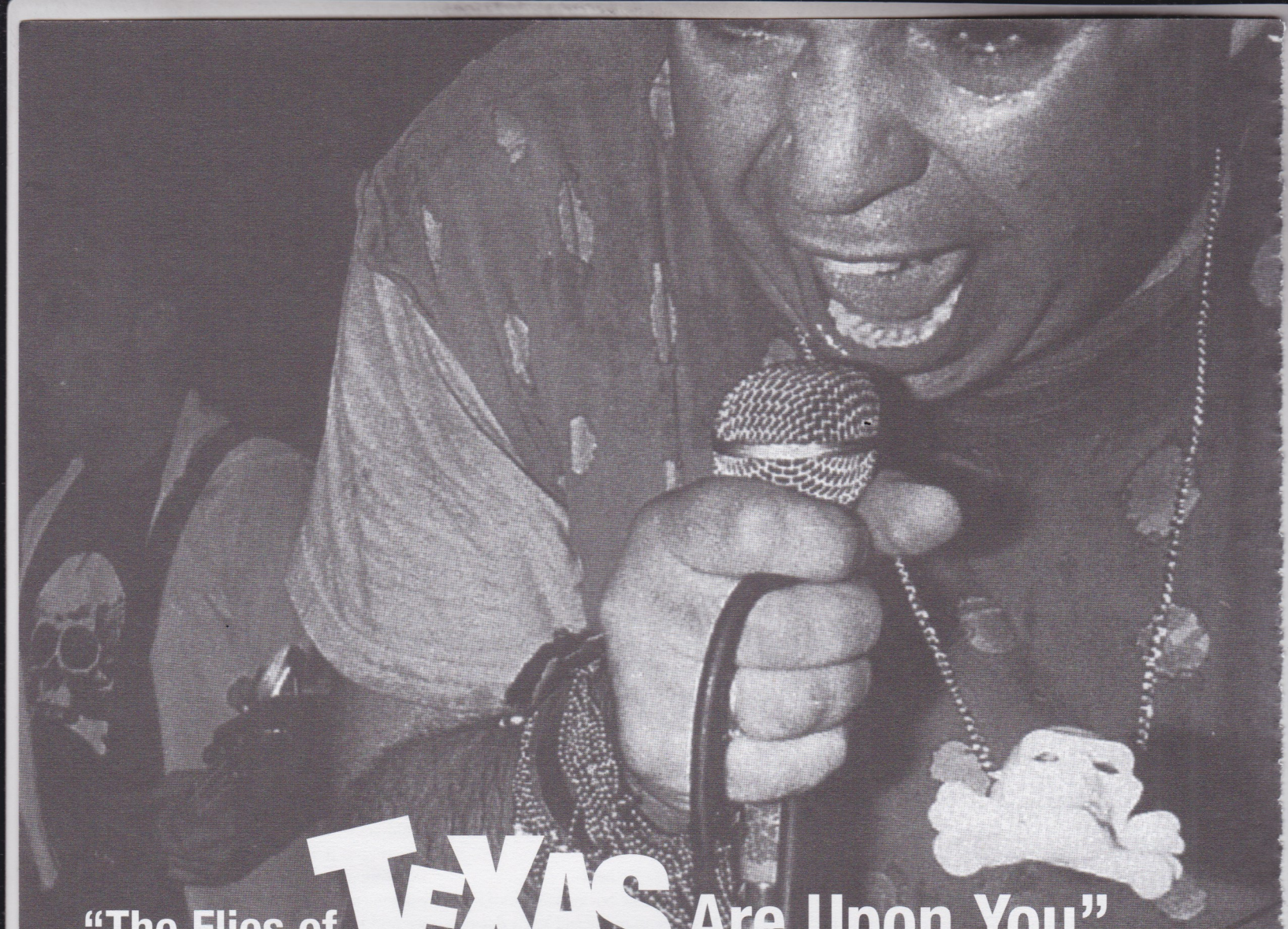
Did you play?

Yeah, but only school, but they played on teams. They took it further, and still play on teams, like company teams, or local area teams.

The new record is not on New Red Archives or Cleopatra, your last labels here in America.

(laughs). These are the kind of questions you should ask Nicky because I kind of don't know what label it's on and I kind of don't care. I think you're talking about the French thing, aren't you? I've known this guy for a long, long time, he had a fanzine like yourself and then he started his own record label, and he said Charlie if you put the Subs on it I could get a lot of distribution, even in America, so it was just a little throw away thing we gave him. First of all, it was an experiment between me and Alvin to see if we could still write songs together. It was almost like a failed experiment *(laughs)*. Then Nicky had this thing, "Something in the Air", which I really hate, but I really love the dub version that he spent all day mixing, and it's come out real great. I hate the single, but I do like the dub thing. But I do like the song I wrote that was the first song on it, "Reclaim the Streets." I like that, but everybody in the band hates it, and won't play it. All my people I look up to, like Mark Brennam of Captain Oi records, a great record label in England, one of the biggest punk and oi labels, he loves it. So I'm like, Mark Brennam loves it, and he used to be in the Business as well and they used to write some great songs, and some other people like it, that's good enough for me. Maybe I'll get a new band *(laughs)*.





"The Flies of TEXAS Are Upon You"

By Randy "Biscuit" Turner

Randy "Biscuit" Turner, along with handful of others like Gary Floyd (The Dicks, Black Kali Ma), who was interviewed in the last issue, rose above the lame macho pretense of hardcore and the equally silly trapdoors of punk rock to create a rock'n'roll species onto themselves. Floyd melded the front porch blues of Lighting Hopkins and Howlin' Wolf with a ragged, even obnoxious punk underbelly, while "Biscuit" hinted at New Wave early on but in the end throw his towel towards funk that was as much Tina Turner live at Carnegie Hall as it was early Parliament/Funkadelic. Both were almost ten years older than many of their peers, both were able to avoid Vietnam, and both came from the rural entrenchment of small town East Texas. This alone separated them from the pretense of New York and L.A., and the silver spoon fed, liberal red diaper babies that outweighed Austin's cowpoke side. I like to believe they took their cues from the Bags and the Weirdoes, or from the New York Dolls and Warhol's factory, or from Artaud and H.R. Puffinstuff, but I'm not their biographer, so I'll let you do some guesswork too.

Ian MacKaye first turned me on to "Biscuit," though I had been a huge fan of the Big Boys since I picked up their last album stuffed away in a discount bin at Appletree Records in the late 1980s. It cost me $3.99, but now that I've lost it, it feels like gold bullion. When I was interviewing MacKaye for the last issue, and told him about my punk flier show that travels to different cities, he abruptly responded, "Get a hold of Biscuit. Man, that guy would send me an envelope totally stuffed with flyers every once in awhile." Soon, I was on the Texas punk page on the web, and some kid finally emailed me Biscuit's phone number, and I've been thrilled from my hair follicles to my toenails ever since. Biscuit lives in a house literally stuffed with assemblage pieces, whacky colorful abstract art (he made the Big Boys and Cargo Cult covers) that makes me beg him to set up a gallery show. He's only sold four pieces, and if I remember correctly, he ended up getting the pieces back. Let's just say he's compulsive, but in the best of ways. He also has a haphazard and dizzying collection of black panther TV lights, Japanese toy robots, and other intense pop culture ephemera that he has hoarded from flea markets and discount stores over the years. It's a kitsch version of heaven. This Big Boy, who once saw the Moving Sidewalks (Billy Gibbons from ZZ Top) blow away the Doors in Dallas, or hitchhiked to Lubbock to see Canned Heat rumble outdoors as redneck farmers fertilized their fields in protest, this Big Boy who once wore the craziest circus/drag queen/art saboteur outfits in the music world, the man who left behind the Big Boys to revel in the prolific rock mishmash of Cargo Cult, who gave up playing music a few years ago but still listens to his Rammstein and Killing Jokes CDs, the man who has cut down on sweet treats from the Mexican joint down the street and allows himself only one big Coca Cola a week, the man who, along with John Brannon, is the only old school punk I've met who has truly let down his guard and opened himself to Left of the Dial, has written this piece to inform you about a sliver of history as he knows it. Enjoy.

Courtesy of Bill Daniel

I careen

from the dullest sheen of a broken butter knife to the glistening layered edge of a fresh razorblade. That's how much punk rock kicked me square in the butt.

In 1978, Austin was a sinkhole of cosmic cowboy has-beens and puffy hairdo rock'n'roll reruns that were in dire need of purging. The Exlax ingested was a movement called New Wave/Punk that came along and dumped all prior bowel movements! Yow! Something new was alive and electric in the air. The Ramones, The Police, Roxy Music, Joan Jett and the Runaways, and Joe Jackson all playing at Armadillo Headquarters were a kaleidoscopic peek at things to come.

In late '78, early '79, I was going with my friend Buck Davis to weirdo shows and to see him play bass in a band called the Violators. We saw the Skunks, the Skyscrapers, Eddie and the Inm8's, and the Body Snatchers and knew that this was the fresh breath I needed! It was all pretty snotty rock'n'roll with "smack normal society in the head" lyrics. I went to the New Wave Battle of the bands on 6th St. in 1978 and realized, what with Chatterbox from San Antonio, The Hates from Houston, and the Nervebreakers from Dallas, there was lots of stuff going on Texas-wide. The Sex Pistols even chose two Texas dates to play on their ill-fated American tour but I'm sorry to say that I didn't make the thoroughly deranged San Antonio show. All my friends in attendance said the concert photos didn't lie, it was a near-riot!

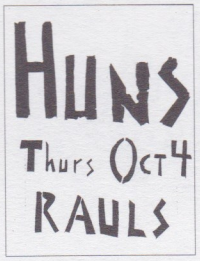
In early 1979, we were going to New Wave Mondays at a weird little conjunto on "the drag" near 26th St., which some crazy Spanish outlaws ran. The place was Raul's, soon to be the holy grail of Texas punkdom. They started having new wave nights and since the burgeoning populace at the University of Texas right across the street was getting bit by the new music bug, lots of "alternatives" showed up and bought many kegs of beer! Joseph Gonzales, Bobby Morales, and the secretive Raul himself said more nights should be dedicated to this new wave thing because the money's good and change is on the wind. This decision opened the floodgate for so many new bands. A great club with just the right improper décor and rat-like ambience located 50 feet from UT. What fun to come!

Every night for awhile you could go see 4 or 5 bands on the same bill for $2.00 or $3.00. Granted, some were depressingly horrific, but that was overridden by the friendship factor. "Wake up America, we dress weird and we act weird and we're not leaving. We play shitty, act shitty, and couldn't care less what the proper attitude should be. Move over 'cosmic cowboy'!" To be amongst 200-300 like-minded artists was such a refreshing time in all of our lives. For some of this crowd, this movement was a tongue in cheek attitude as many were pampered college kids but at least the ideas for new art adventures did exist. Many of my friends truly were the social outcasts and reveled in the anarchistic lifestyle. They played the straight razor games at night and packed the scabs the next day at their sleazy cook jobs.

The first time I met Joseph Gonzales, the manager of Raul's, I had on a huge Christmas tree court jester outfit that I had won the Carnival Brassaliero costume contest an hour earlier at another club. We laughed so hard at my absurdity and daring and immediately became 'core buddies.' He was cool as heck and I always admired him as a mentor and friend. Ten months later I was appearing live on his stage with the Big Boys as the second show of our career happened at Raul's in November of 1979 with five songs from our own menu. Thanks to Joseph and to all you cohorts who believed in the fact that Austin had opened up an entirely new kind of Christmas package!



We Big Boys were hideous musicians at first but grew to be mediocre so I just say we did progress! We joined the growing throng of bands, artists, poets, and slackers who made Raul's their home. The music was the main drawing card but the good times in the parking lot, the poster art jams, the illicit gluing up of said posters, the peppermint schnapps chugging contests, the hundreds of house parties, all the budding film people and writers surrounding me all made Austin so incredibly unique at that time. I was truly astounded at what my Texas peers were coming up with.



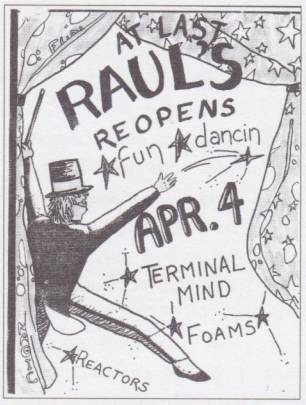
The Huns were a very popular and totally bizarre lot of a band and looked forward to by all. The Huns bust at Raul's was a milestone for the Texas scene as it got national publicity in Rolling Stone and other national publications. Seems like an Austin cop who had wandered into Raul's objected to being kissed by Phil Tolstead, the lead singer. The ensuing handcuffing got a tidbit out of hand, the Huns left an incredible legacy with their antics. One face I'll never forget and is seared into my memory forever is that of Dan Transmission, the 300 pound keyboardist for the Huns with his monk outfit and a huge black and white upside down cross painted on his face. Their 45 rpm single 'Glad He's Dead' about that JFK thing was quite a thorn for a while!



Through the many months of Raul's I saw lots of great shows like the Dils from L.A., The Urinals from L.A., D.O.A. from Vancouver, Canada, the Psychedelic Furs from England (2 nights at $3.00 each), Roky Erickson, and Black Flag from L.A. I watched Dave Edmunds, Patti Smith, and Elvis Costello all pass through the crowd. As fun as all these touring acts were, many local acts could blow away the stars on any night. People like Not For Sale, Offenders, Standing Waves, Terminal Mind, The Reactors, Millionaires, Sharon Tate's Baby, Access 88, Delinquents, 7 Systems, The Next, Radio Free Europe, and the unreal Gary Floyd and the Dicks kept the local band flame burning like a barn on fire. Really Red, Mydolls, Drug Puppies, D.R.I. coming from Houston, the Nervebreakers, Hugh Beaumont Express, Stickmen with Rayguns from Dallas, Fearless Iranians from Hell, Raging Woodies, Bang Gang from San Antonio and the Vomit Pigs from El Paso would all come to town and just tear it up to highly appreciative whacked out audiences. There's a great Live at Raul's from 1979/early 1980 with many bands from that era that documents some of the most raucous moments in Texas rock'n'roll.

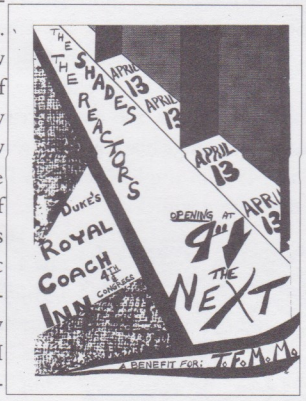
Since Raul's was right on the main strip in the University of Texas area, the fraternity boys from all the Kampus Klan houses would

delight in driving by and hollering foolishness at everyone outside. One particular evening when the crowd was as huge outside as inside, the frats kept cruising by in their hot new Firebirds screaming obscenities and spraying beer and fire extinguisher juice on everyone. After their fourth "drive by" certain un-named parties lay in wait in the bushes a few yards south of Raul's with a huge cinder block! Yep, you guessed it, their last and unluckiest pass saw the cinder block go right through the front windshield! The crowd roared approval as the frats madly screeched to a halt. Uh-oh! Bad mistake! 100 punks made a bee-line for the 'bird and the now newly wizened wise asses sped away just in time to miss a good ass-whuppin! This crap and abuse from the frats happened often as friends constantly related stories about how the frats beat them up, cut their hair, or verbally tortured them. It's real different today as some of the frats are so Gap minded mall hip and have some of the dorkiest new wave hairdos alive. Store bought punky-punk, fresh from America's shopping centers!





Raul's, under Joseph Gonzales' loving hand, lasted until 1980 and made all who went there sick to know it was closing. Lots of last night free beer and champagne and revelry closed a chapter in the musically surreal scrapbook of Texas. Raul's rose from the dead for a few more months under the thumb of Steve Hayden. It did get freshly painted and cleaned up and got a new P.A. system, but somehow the essence of the magic got swept out of the backdoor with the sawdust. As much as the scene was still so eclectic and diversified, Steve put out the second Live at Raul's record with only the Big Boys and the Dicks on it. I was honored to get to be recorded but it caused riffs in the scene because only two bands were included, quite unlike the 10-12 bands on the first live record. I was hurt and happy at the same time, caught in the middle as it was. The last night of this Raul's saw a lot of heavily graffitied sheetrock come down and the toilet seats taken as souvenirs.

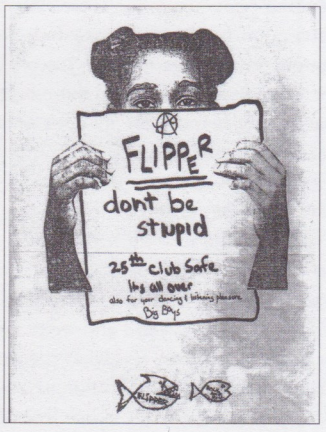




A lot of the action was then picked up by Dukes Royal Coach Inn at 4th and Congress Avenue in downtown Austin, the site of the 1960s hip psychedelic art spot called the Vulcan Gas Company. The stage was rickety, the dressing room was the three-foot wide hallway leading to the alley and you generally pissed the local barflies off with loud soundchecks at 7pm and then drove 'em out at 10 p.m. when the shows began. I saw the Cramps there and the Big Boys brought the Butthole Surfers up from San Antonio for their first Austin show. Duke's was a wonderfully fun nest with Congress Ave. as a backdrop but unfortunately, things didn't last long there. I did see the Perverted Popes play there and that is abusively unreal memories enough!

Brad First, who had done a lot of the Duke's booking, started working with the people at Club Foot at 4th and Brazos downtown. This was one of the coolest clubs I have ever been to as five levels of seating from the basement to the second story rafters made for many groovy viewing spots. They even had a nice catwalk that went up and around back of the band so you could get a great overhead panorama of the club and stage. The Big Boys were whacking out some looney tunes at that time and got to open for people like X from L.A., New York's Plasmatics, Trouble Funk from D.C., Flipper from Frisco, Minor Threat from D.C., the Go-Go's and the futuristic and gentle Grace Jones. 800-1,000 people shows for local acts were common as this was a scene hotspot. The Continental Club and Liberty Lunch had their fair share of shows as well during the '81 thru '84 period. Sonic Youth at the Continental Club, thank you gods of rock'n'roll! When Soap Creek Saloon moved to South Congress Ave., they even had some fun get togethers like the "Offenders Crazy Motorhead Attack Day." With shows happening at odd venues all across the city, I still feel some of my favorite shows were at Club Foot. I saw Roxy Music with Bryan Ferry, the dark and mysterious Stranglers, the FleshEaters, and one of my favorites, Gang of Four, there. I was in the background when they filmed "Roadie" with Meatlump! The Standing Waves got the house band part in the movie and they said Meatloaf was a sloth. Club Foot was cool enough to have a Sunday afternoon minors matinee where the underage crowd could come and rage. Rage they did as shows with The Dicks, Fang from San Francisco, Stretch Marks from Winnipeg, Canada, and Lost in Space from San Antonio made for incredibly fun Sunday afternoons. Bad thing about daytime shows is that punks don't look so good in daytime light, all clammy and pasty they is!

During all these years, events at various one-time venues happened a lot. The Big Boys were responsible for several side line excursions like L.A.'s Saccharine Trust, Nig Heist, Black Flag tour with The Dicks and the Big Boys at the American Lebanese Associations meeting hall. The hugely attended Texas Love-In was held there also with Really Red, Butthole Surfers, Dicks, Big Boys, and The Recipients from Dallas. After the Love-In, we in the clean up crew found a purse with 54 cents and an ice pick in it! One huge show at the VFW hall on East Saint Elmo Road (the patron saint of frivolity) started out as a big success until the toilets were kicked from the walls and water went everywhere. I was screaming from the stage please don't kick holes in the sheetrock and screw up another fun spot! My friend runs up to the stage and tells me the urinals have been breached and it's Niagara Falls with turds! This makes me extra mad as these were special men's urinals that had little plastic propeller inserts in the pee bowl to keep cigarettes from going down the water pipes. The propellers would spin around when you peed on them and point to different sayings! Manly man, stud, wimp, try harder, cry baby, all made you grunt out your last pee drops to land on something cool like King Kong or Superstar. Indeed, pleasure demised.



Downtown at Lavaca St. at 4th, a crazy underground bunker called Voltaire's Basement existed for a brief while. Its only escape hatch was one crowded stairwell that made the element of danger way more concrete. Several art shows there deemed quite science fiction and music near voodoo rituals made this 125 degree sweatbox sticky rich with



lore. One great night was with Scratch Acid when Gibby from the Butthole Surfers came from the crowd and started bitching at David Yow, Scratch Acid's lead singer. Gibby broke a fake "prop bottle" over David's head and the crowd went nuts. It was "gossip too much" for weeks afterward as David and Gibby laughed their asses off at the gullible sheep. I hope I'm not lying but I think it was also Gibby who was "birthed" through a cut in a king-size mattress that had a giant vagina spray painted on it. Out pops Gibby strumming some ridiculous umbilical chords on his guitar! Pretty!

One other small niche in the history of Austin weird wave hot spots was Sparkys, run by my friend Lyle who now helps run Amayonia Aquariums. It was just off Justin Lane and was around 6-8 months during the early '84 season. Hot as a fresh bowl of gravy and darker than the inside of a cow it was, but shows like the Dicks (old and new), Twist Ties, Glass Eye, Not For Sale all made it another especially adventuresome spot. Once I saw the rich but deranged soundman get pissed at a new microphone and throw it out the second story window. I, as a singer, went Ding, and ran to the parking lot to find it. I found it and still use it today. Thank you, oh thank you!

Several crazy shows were held at the old Skyline Club way out North Lamar Blvd. near Brake Lane. This is where they say Elvis had performed before and it was a treat first to be inside to try to find Elvis' drugs or maybe a sweat stained hankie. We had a double Kung-Fu kick ass Halloween show there with many unnatural acts like Doctor's Mob, San Antonio's Marching Plague, and Big Boys performing. One of the best shows I ever saw was there with Minor Threat who 'kicked the toaster into the bathwater of normalcy' with these monstrous 2 punk buzzsaw guitar attacks. With Brian Baker moving from bass to guitar and the addition of a champion bass navigator, it was truly a punk rock Kodak moment. Whee!

After Esther's Follies moved to their new digs, there was a ton of shows at their old stomping grounds, the Ritz Theatre at 6th and Neches. Wow, what a mix that was to see people-wise. America and Europe's wildest punk bands with a huge local base of party-goers made the scene inside and outside the Ritz just absolute circus-like. Imagine Billy Bubba from Beaumont comes to town to see the Longhorns play some idiot kind of grunt ball and ending up drunk on 6th Street. He will be stared at and possibly confronted by people who he would think might have come from Mars. In all honesty, I can't remember ever seeing any fights or serious illness happening, though the Ritz may be the hottest club temperature-wise of any club I've ever been in. No fans of distinction, no A.C., and pitiful ventilation made it the devil's closet. Shows there were many and as diverse as eggs at Easter. Detroit's Necros, Austin's Kamikaze Refrigerators, Austin's Happy Death, Misfits from New Jersey, Articles of Faith from Chicago, Austin's Infected made all sorts of music and art patrons show up. Jim Franklin, the intriguing and dadaistic armadillo painter/sculptor lived in the film room booth upstairs for awhile but I think the punks drove him out. He, in my eyes, is one of Austin's early true punks. The man who has vision mere mortals know not of!



Studio 29 at Rio Grande and 29th St. made a fling of it for awhile in '83 to early '84. It had been Rome Inn Pizza for years where Stevie Ray Vaughn held court with his magical mystery shows (Stevie I still love you and miss you). Now, the likes of the Buffalo Gals and Kathy McCarty and Husker Du from Minneapolis doing "8 Miles High" graced the tomato paste covered linoleum floor. This is where I also saw the Butthole Surfers try to introduce the saxophone as a sex partner. Bless the owner JoAnne's little head as she was a very understanding artist who gave much of her time and energy to the scene.

Many shows like New York's Samhain, Phoenix's Jodie Foster's Army, D.C.'s Marginal Man, L.A.'s X and countless local acts at Liberty Lunch proved the movement was still hugely alive. Marc Pratt and J-Net at the Lunch were enthusiastically supportive of a maniacally artistic but wildly uncontrollable scene for years. Marc and J, those that know thank you dearly.

For reasons stranger than what surrealism will ever be, I took a break from music in Nov. 1994 for a few months. The scene glowed merrily along with shows at the Beach and South Banks but that is a whole 'nuther bag, one I'm not so qualified to speak about.

Through tears and fog and love and hate, this is a tiny take on my view of the New Wave/Punk rock revolution in Austin and across Texas. It is obviously incomplete so I ask you to seek out people like Margaret Moser, Randy Franklin, Cindy Melby, Rudy Hyde, and Buxf Parrot, or the Royal Hawaiian Prince who are also keepers of many wonderful stories about a very unique and exciting time in Austin's long musical history. Ask Chris Wing about how after one of a Jerry's Kids rehearsals, their "mental enhancement tablets" allowed them to form a human chain and save a drowning lady's life from the flood waters plowing down 45th St.; ask Control Rat X about his 'zine "Xyphoid Process" which he did when he was 14 years old; ask Ty Gavin if women should be wilder; ask Terry Lord why she's so blessed with being the absolute perfect drummer; and lastly, ask the frat boy I knocked the hell out of on the dance floor at Raul's if his chin healed properly. Ha-ha!

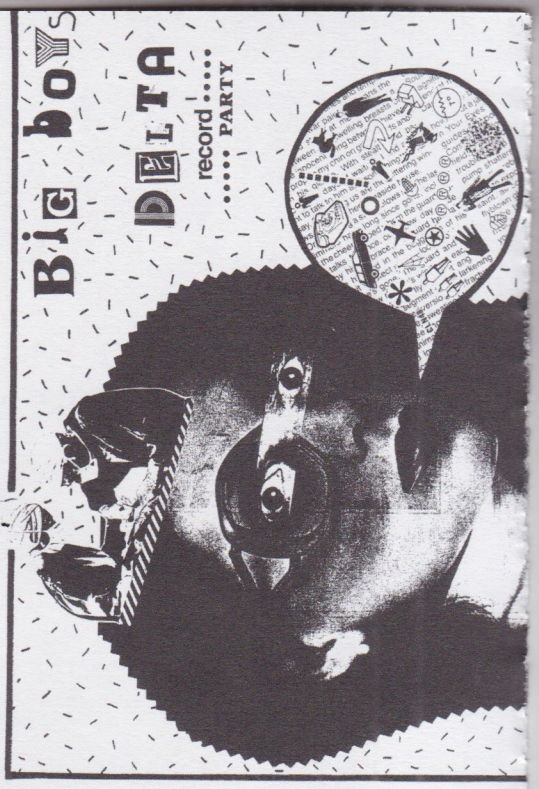


When you view old pictures of the New Wavers and punkers from back then, don't be so quick to judge harshly at what you see. What we thought was totally gear in 1979 looks like cartoons now but your brand of grunge rock filth-fashion will look like absolute wino horror to the silver suited platinum bewigged edge rockers of 2014! Respect your roots for you too will gather mold.

At the last part of the major punk movement in 1985, I made a shirt that had band names of as many Texas band friends as I could remember on it. I counted over 200 and missed many others I'm sure and certainly do apologize to those I missed. What follows is a sampling just to let you know how rich our state's heritage is in the Punk/New Wave generation. Many of these bands recorded tapes and vinyl and are rare glimpses of a cowpoke's take on the revolution. Much of this still exists so seek them out. Sid was vicious, but Bobby Sox from Dallas (Stickmen with Rayguns), who died in 2000, could kick Sid's ass while sitting in a lawn chair.

Love and donuts,
Randall J. "Biscuit" Turner

Randy "Biscuit" Turner churned out fliers for his bands the Big Boys and Cargo Cult like he was tossing candy and Zingers in the wind. His work melded raw, cartoonish, child-like naivete with an acute eye for 1970s funk posters, two tone ska trends, and skate rock. Unlike the morbid decay and apocalypse of Pushead and the dark nihilism of Raymond Pettibon, Turner's fliers evoke the bombastic, feverish, and irreverent Do-It-Yourself side of punk, not its gory underbelly. His poems, including the pieces included here, use humor to explore topics like the middle-class obsessive-compulsive desire to collect household knickknacks like "bronze lions," while his lyrics have reached out a bit further to include concerns about war, poverty, and history.







A PARTIAL LIST OF LATE '70s/EARLY '80s TEXAS PUNK BANDS

AUSTIN BANDS
Vestals
Trouble Boys
Toxic Shock
God on Drugs
Whoom Elements
Droogs
Noise Band Death
Ideals
Secret Science
Electropods
Technicolor Lawns
Jitters
Foams
Chickadiesels
Hormones
Rank and File
Pagans
Love Pretzels
WatchTower
Stiff Kittens
Fad
Inepts
Court Reporters
El B. J.
Electric Tools
Fudge Tunnels
Gator Family
Criminal Crew
Max and the Make-ups
Creamed Weenies
Stabbing Spree
Gay Politicians
Overkill
Meat Joy
Re-cords
Sinequan
Delta
Electrodes
SKP's
Stick Figures
Talmage D'amour
Body Nightclub
Skip 7
Insex
Happy Death
Norvello

HOUSTON BANDS
Judys
Beef Skirts
Culturcide
Hates
D.R.I.
Killerwatyy
Throbbing Cattle
Verbal Abuse
Party Owls
Degenerates
Bevatron
Finy
Skuds
Western Alliance
Punk Flamingos
Decomposers
Haskells
Ralphs
Kravens
AK-47

EL PASO
Vomit Pigs

FT. WORTH
Brave Combo

DALLAS BANDS
Bomb Squad
Devices
Masters of Disaster
Stickmen with Rayguns
Non Compos Mentis
Man in the Reign
The Doo
Point of Departure
Telephones
Stinky Shits
Assassins
Moving Products

SAN ANTONIO
Rejects
Toe Jam
Fearless Iranians From Hell
Mystery Dates
Bang Gang
Jack Officers
Raging Woodies
Heather Leather



"History"
We all talk about world peace
But then war comes again
Dr. King and the Kennedys
Murder takes another friend
Korea, Nam, El Salvador
The name is never the same
Laser guns and germ warfare
New toys but the same old game
History repeats itself
People are starving everyday
The poor and sick are going uncured
While Mr. Big's huge bank account
Lets him rest so assured
The 1920s and the 1950s
No one was singing the blues
Depression came and took it away
You're always paying the dues
History repeats itself
Punk rock's not so far removed
From Little Richard or the early Stones
Just look around and see how much
And just how little we have grown
Sometimes the scene's so very good
Sometimes there's nothing to do
The past's a circle going round and round
The future's up to you.

"Sensible Shoes"
I'm all strung out in TV land
It has become Mom to me
I base all my life's important decisions
On how "Colombo" would want me to be
I religiously follow all the sales papers
I've got a closet that's a Ronco museum
"Impulse to shop" is a living nightmare
But I must have some more plastic B.M.

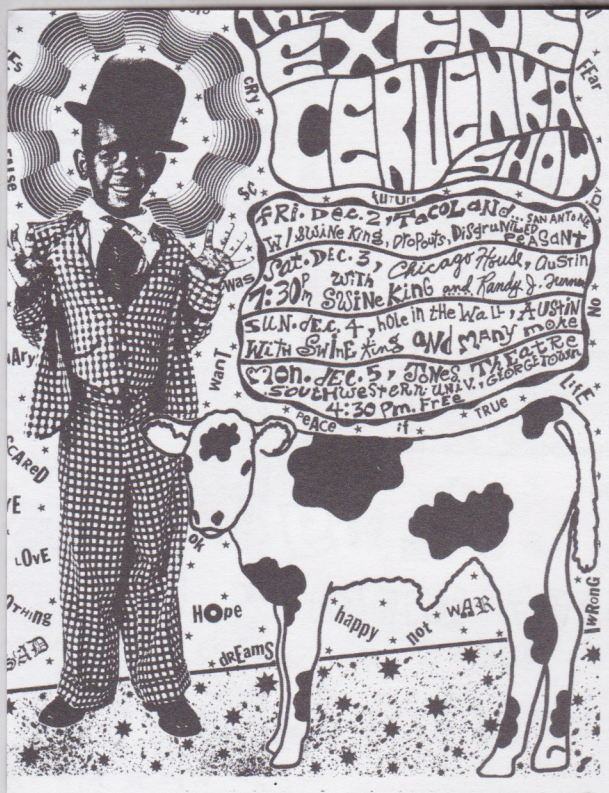
I know I don't need all this stuff
But I wanna be part of the trend
Please tell me there will always be malls
So my shopping spree will never end.
Ah, life's pleasures are indeed intense
Where's the money now for the new bean-bag chair?
I've got three jobs now to support this life
But, damnit, my trailer still seems bare

I'm wearing sensible shoes and stuck in a rut
The kids are all in jail and the neighbors think I'm a nut
I cannot decide if a 3-car garage is enough
I played it safe and moved to Vegas
Life is so rough!

"Saturday's Sofa-Size Spectacular"
Brush strokes delicate like picket fence
painters' scenes of a perfect world in watercolor
Cheap trailer houses wood paneling waiting
and waiting for the arrival of a fake Norman Rockwell
Precious are the memories of red barn scenarios assembly-line painted
by 20 at a time
Crashing waves kissing shoreline lighthouses
painted by people who've never been there.

A piece in mostly red might match our sofa,
bronze lions will blend in with the carpet
Subject matter doesn't matter as long as it's the right size
Doesn't matter 'cause after a year it will hang in the carport
Art for the living room, art for the den
We'll buy escapist paintings and think we're









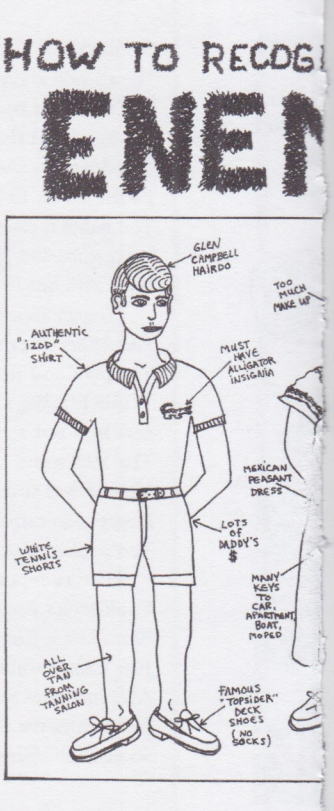


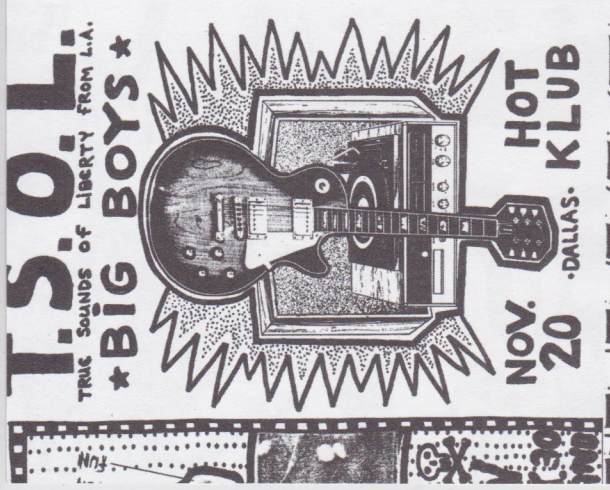
world travelers
Painted with joy like that Afro-haired guy on TV
We'll feel good sofa size while the world unravels.

Accentuary pieces go for $12.95, today only. Get a couple,
we've got the wall space
Visions of early America hang above beanbag couches
The Goodwills are filled with art throwaways
Like casting pearls before swine, as the song goes; for
$12.95, you don't really get attached
"Fine" art for sale in vacant lots across America
Wannabe Dali's painting roadside attraction

Emergency liquidation, themes go quickly out of fashion
Paris to Tickle-Me-Elmo, the kids get fluffy kittens
Sensitive subjects painted on actual canvas
Painted by cigarette smoking wife beaters
A huge selection just arrived from elsewhere and Hong Kong
All packed up in semis in a smelly warehouse
Sweatshop factory Renoirs destined for Wal-Mart showrooms
Destined to make Bubba and Laverne proud

Measure all your trailer walls, and do proceed with haste
Poodle pictures sell the best. I advise, don't be late.







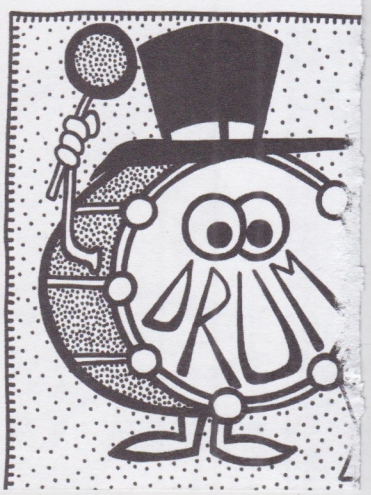




PHOTO: PAUL HELDING JEFF PAINS HIS HOUSE SEPTEMBER 2001

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121. BLUETIP	'Polymer'	*	Ⓒ
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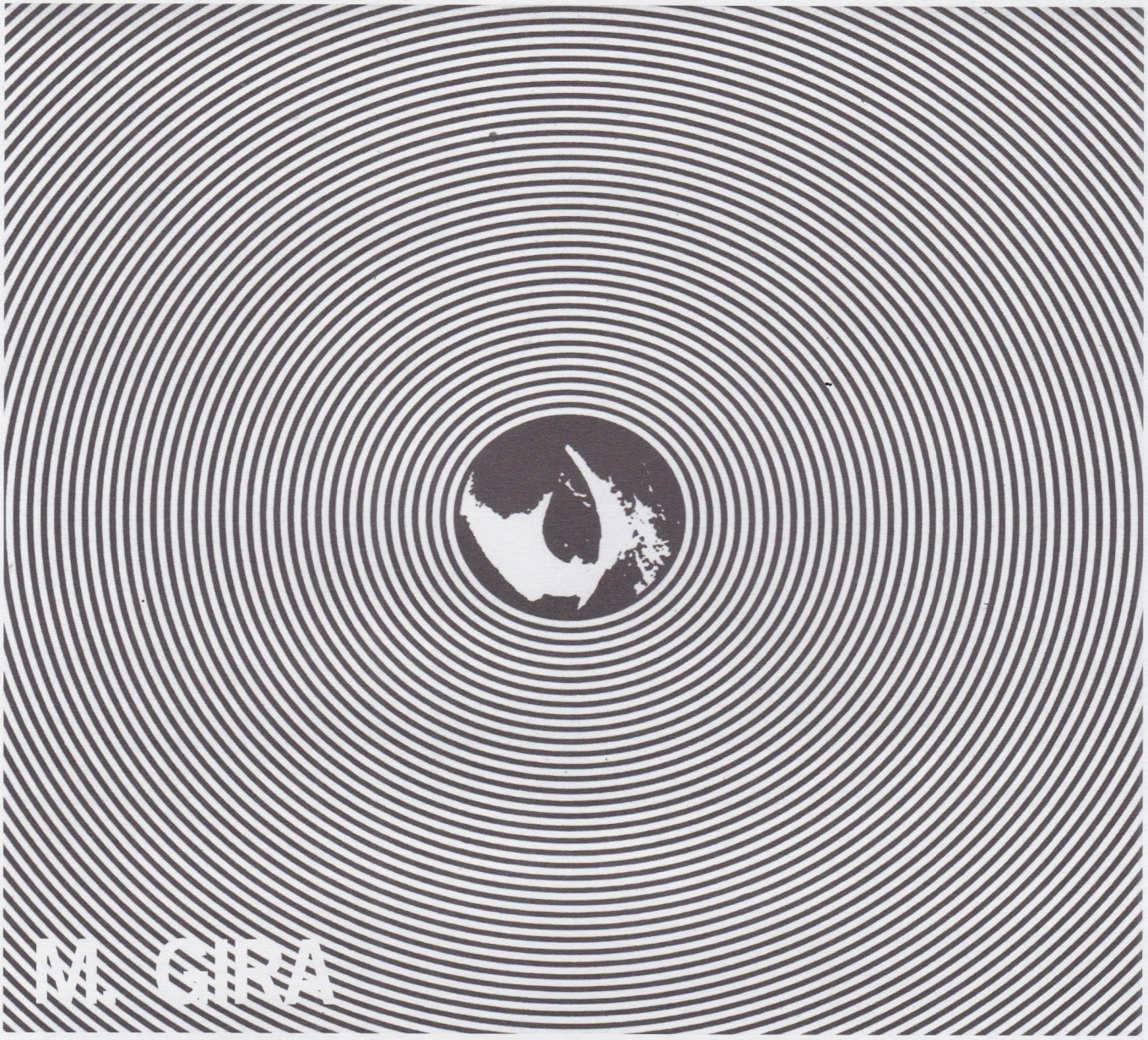
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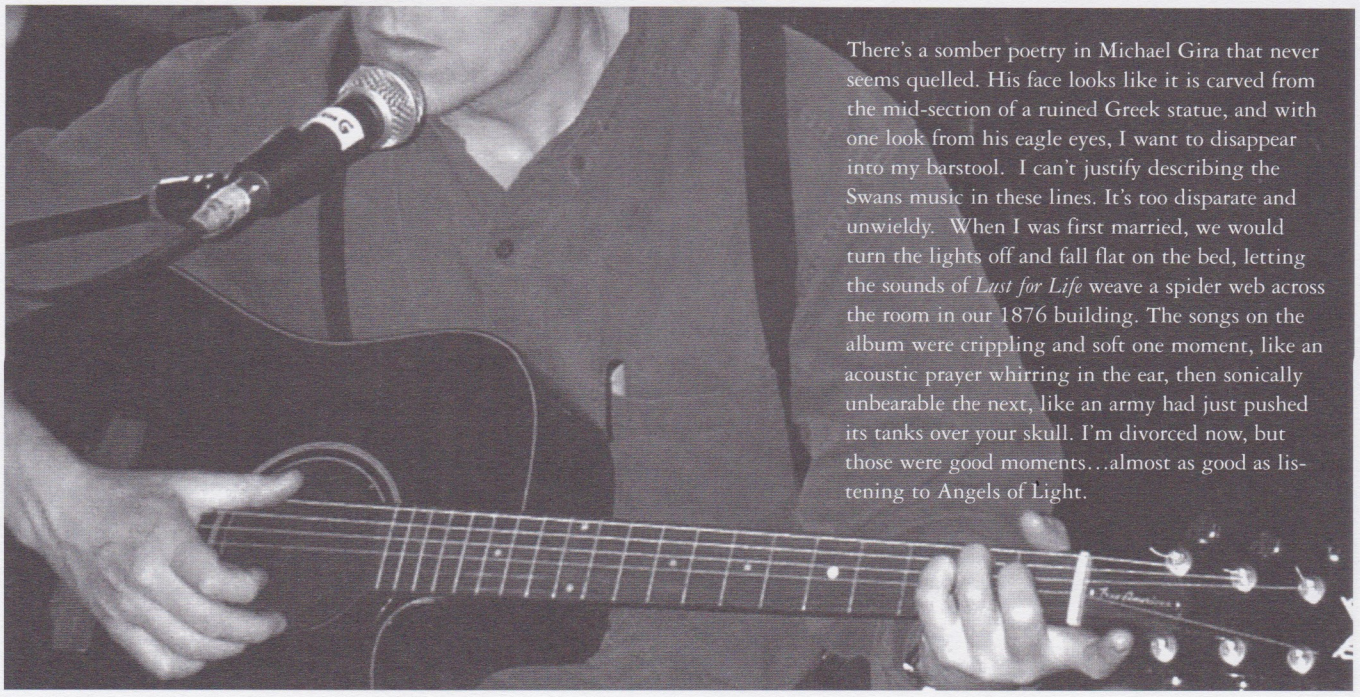
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There's a somber poetry in Michael Gira that never seems quelled. His face looks like it is carved from the mid-section of a ruined Greek statue, and with one look from his eagle eyes, I want to disappear into my barstool. I can't justify describing the Swans music in these lines. It's too disparate and unwieldy. When I was first married, we would turn the lights off and fall flat on the bed, letting the sounds of *Lust for Life* weave a spider web across the room in our 1876 building. The songs on the album were crippling and soft one moment, like an acoustic prayer whirring in the ear, then sonically unbearable the next, like an army had just pushed its tanks over your skull. I'm divorced now, but those were good moments...almost as good as listening to Angels of Light.

You've described the internet as a series of tentacles that can allow you to find the bands' (Angels of Light, etc.) natural audience, so is the Internet simply a cyber-age Sears catalog?
Since the major media is pretty much completely closed off to interesting music these days, it's just a fortuitous new way to reach the audience for the music we release. I guess in a way, it's like the network of fanzines that existed in the punk days.

Do you think that it offers opportunities for exploring new ways of making music, such as making an album from a chat room scenario, where everyone could be in different countries/cities, but playing simultaneously, if they have the right equipment?
I don't mean to be rude, but that idea is repugnant to me. I'm not very enthusiastic about the idea of diffusing "authorship." The best art/music (at least in the western world), in my mind, has always been made by fiercely individualistic, even megalomaniacal people...

An author you enjoy is J.G. Ballad, whose book *High Rise* you read some years back. He has called his home Shepperton, a suburb outside of London, the city of the here and now. It is a city of interwoven byways, parking lots, and trimmed lawns, which is chock full of speed and consumerism (things that that Swans seemed to challenge or examine)that outperforms the antiquated, last-century holdovers Paris, New York, and London. You have always been on the cusp of essentially modern American music that feeds on the past, from the Beatles to Johnny Cash, and live in northern Georgia. Is this home life distant from Ballard's world, remote, and shielded, or do you feel even rural Georgia will find itself transformed in the next few years into Shepperton?
I haven't read Ballard in years, though I enjoyed his work then. Anyway, I lived in Atlanta for a few years, but am now back in NYC, where I belong.

In poetry, every word is essential, every word counts. Which seems to recall the Swan's early discipline, where it was "difficult to get the right precision- None of it (was) improvised...It (was) calculated." The Angels of Light were much more relaxed and impromptu on the first record, but "How I Loved You..." was much more rehearsed. Why return to such discipline?
The first Angels CD *New Mother* was carefully arranged and orchestrated, recorded from the bottom up, starting with the basic structure of the song played on acoustic guitar, with voice. "How I Loved You" was essentially the same, except that the arranging was done in the rehearsal studio, then performed live as a group in the studio - then overdubs. Still, I'd say that the new record is looser, actually, in that the performances were pushed and stretched according to the feel of the moment...

I am surprised that the Young God Records, even though you want it to be "a library with a specific identity" ala 4AD or Factory, hasn't released singer songwriters (you do love Bob Dylan for his sense of place and storytelling, and would like to produce Leonard Cohen) akin to your own style. For example, Epitaph, a hardcore punk label, released Tom Waits and Merle Haggard on an imprint called Anti. Is that simply not interesting, or not feasible?
I just release what comes my way, if I find it interesting and rewarding to listen to in some way. I don't have any particular affinity for one genre of music over another. The main ingredients I look for are passion, commitment, feeling, and of course originality - that latter not so much for the idea of stretching the boundaries of music or style, but more for the strength and commitment of the individual statement...As it happens, I'm talking to a young man who's a singer/songwriter about releasing his work right now, because I think his voice is beautiful, and the songs are very sensual and pure. I'm also considering releasing some santeria ritual music, and there's a few electronic based things I'm considering too...I really don't know how they all connect - somewhere nonverbally in the back of my head, I guess...

Although the Swans were lumped in with the Noise crowd of New York, among them Live Skull, Sonic Youth, and Head of David, at one time you regretted distancing yourself from that clique. Do you still?
Head of David, as I recall, were from England, and came much later...yes, I'm glad I distanced myself from other people, especially from any "scene" that may or may not have existed...

You've called TV the first step towards completely living in the abstract, a very spiritual thing that can also be very mundane and a mind control device. Do all these possibilities increase with digital and satellite TV (300 channels and nothing to watch), or have we seen a situation where TV has been outmoded by computers, which, in a sense, unplug its power, bringing about a whole new abstract life on-line? Will this make music from such an environment more or less exciting?
I wouldn't want to make music from such an environment. My computer is to me just a slightly more complicated typewriter, and an easily accessible research tool. I'm not really interested in fetishizing technology...It's just a tool.

The Village Voice says, "right out-of-the-gate Young God Records is shaping up to be one of the strongest independents in the U.S." Is that ironic, considering, the label is not new, and the press doesn't produce much of a buying audience?
Well, Young God Records didn't really become a label per se until just recently, when we started to release music by people other than myself. Before that, it was just really the only option there for me, as I'd had it with labels, and they with me.

You have described the process of writing a song as having an "internal logic," but does the same hold true for the instrumentation? Do the sounds of flutes, xylophone, timpani, E-bow, etc. come to your ear or mind intact within that same logic?
Since I have no musical training, I work from instinct and intuition, and trial and error, often with only a kind of visual impression of where I want the song or arrangement to end up. I'm always open to accidents and chance, and often build upon a chance event or sound, making it the central facet of the thing, in the end.

People have described you on and off as "guarded, but exposed. With a reflexive anti-intellectualism," and a healthy disregard for artsy-fartsy comments on his work. But you've also said that "Morrison was no illiterate fool, and neither was Iggy." So why the suspicion about people delving deep and trying to formulate ideas





about your work? Is it just old-fashioned humility, or really a distrust of all things academic? And where do these feelings come from, an upbringing, a series of regretful events?
As I said, I generally work from instinct, but am also very methodical and sort of obsessive about the final shape things take. I'm certainly not an "anti-intellectual" or opposed to ideas. I just usually find that ideas come through doing the work, and not the other way around.

Do you believe that rape is a symbol of capitalism, and if that still holds true, how does having a label or selling merchandise not fall into the trap?
Everybody has to make a living, and I certainly don't see anything wrong with selling something you made.

Why was Swans' cover of Joy Division's "Love Will Tear Us Apart" something that you loathed and felt was the lowest moment in your life? Because of the insincerity? A so-called messy recording? So many people were drawn to it, because they probably in some way identified the Swans with Joy Division, so are you negating your own fans' pleasure, or revealing perhaps too much about your own choices?
I just think that recording sounds vacant and didn't do the original justice, that's all. I've done a lot of good work and a lot of bad work over the years. That fell into the latter category.

At least a few of you and Jarboe's records are still in Alternative Tentacles' hands, and your book is still published by 2.13.61. Eventually, will you bring those into the Young God fold?
My book was published by 2.13.61. ...I'm happy to have AT continue to release that record. I like Jello personally, and I admire the sheer force of individual will that went into building up AT.

Between driving down Hollywood Boulevard thinking about drawing, video-art, and seeing the Screamers and X for the last time, or hanging in New York after a long night with Circus Mort and checking out a hardcore matinee at CBGBs, one might think that you lived the good "punk" life. But why do you regret the day you started your first band?
I'm just really a solitary kind of person, and making music is anything but a solitary pursuit. Just to hear what you want to hear takes an enormous amount of organizational effort, and money. But the art world's not for me, and I want to make music, so there it is. I'll be getting protools or the like soon, so I'll probably shift to working alone at home. I do think a "career in music" is a terrible career choice, and I always counsel younger people to have some kind of alternative way of making money.

You call the stories in *The Consumer* a series of fairy tales. If one thinks back to the Bible, talking trees and weird magic snakes in Eden probably began this tradition. Do fairy tales somehow penetrate deeper than simple prose, which is often associated with the dry journalistic style of Hemingway or the minimalism of others?
I haven't ever started out writing with the idea of writing a fairy tale. It's just that in retrospect, that's what the stories seem like to me. The books I enjoy most are the ones I can completely lose myself within, and I try to write with that goal in mind too.

Yet your own sentences are truncated, razor-clean, and blunt, yet evocative too, like Edgar Allen Poe. When you write, do you feel that style matters, and are there any authors that you keep in mind when your hand moves over the page?
No, I don't think about other authors when I write. That would be a disaster.

Do you remember writing before you began drawing at an early age, or vice versa?
I always drew, but I started writing when I was about 15. I wish I still have that stuff. Maybe I'd find some inspiration in it!

"My True Body," which is about hearing and seeing an Arab boy raped while you were 15 and stuck in an Israeli jail/old army barracks for dealing drugs with other vagabond European hippie type, reads like some kind of Genet story about prison society. How did this experience shape your idea of sex, modes of power, and being an outsider?
I suppose it was central to my view of human nature at one time, but I'm much more tolerant and forgiving now, even optimistic sometimes.

The early idea of the Swan's to annihilate the body in order to free the soul comes close to Hart Crane's notion of creating "new thresholds, new anatomies" or Artaud's notion of deranging the senses to "succeed inorganically reinvolving man...To reassume his place between dreams and events." Did the Swans ever think about their art in these kinds of terms, or was it about the chops, the rhythm, and pulse of blood and muscle brought down from the Stooges and others?
I just always tried to make the music I wanted to hear, without analyzing too much why. Most of the energy has (and still does) went into the discipline of making the thing on its' own terms, without really questioning why.

Do you consider yourself a misanthrope, or is that just an easy way for people to write you off, rather than them really think about what your music embodies?
No I do not consider myself to be a misanthrope. I'm constantly surprised by people, and the world. Hate closes doors.

These days you seem to be gauging an audience before putting out more material, like an album you recorded mostly at your desk. Is this just common sense business, sort of like how fan clubs used to release limited editions, or is there a sense that your place in the feverishly bullshit music industry has grown so small that it allows you to redefine your audience and evaluate your relationship to them?
I don't ever think about the audience or the "market" when I make music.

Why does Nico remain so damn enticing, besides the warped icy beauty of her records, or the Venus/Salome duality she is able to mirror in every picture except for the later years when she looks bruised and solemnly tangled up in a heroin stupor too deep for mere mortals?
She remains enticing because much of her music is very beautiful indeed. •

STILL INDEPENDENT AND STRONG AFTER ALL THESE YEARS.

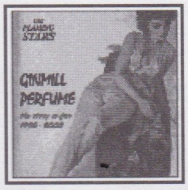




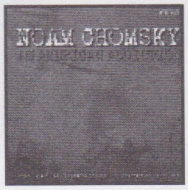
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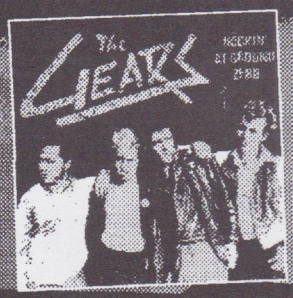
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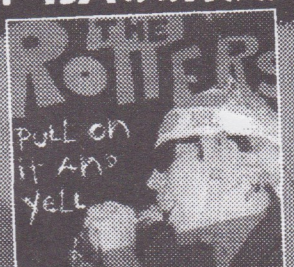
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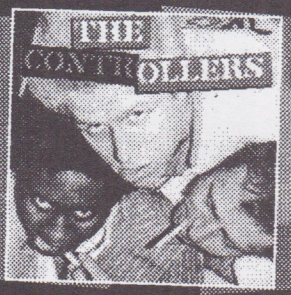
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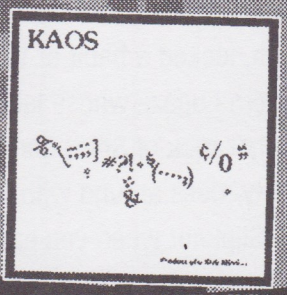
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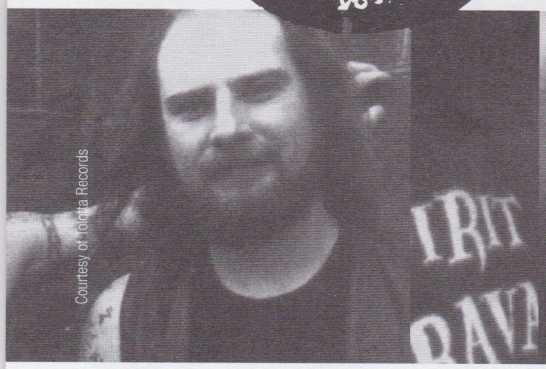
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SPIRIT CARA



Courtesy of Tolotta Records

Wino was always a rocker. It's almost as if childhood avoided him, or he was born in a cocoon stuffed with old Stooges, Sabbath, and Marc Bolan records. He made punks sway to his metal onslaught during the salad days of harDCore, hitched a ride on a bus known as St. Vitus during the dog days of SST, reformed the Obsessed and flirted with major label meltdown, kicked a habit or two, and reignited a friendship with Joe Lally from Fugazi, whose label Tolotta offers America the drenched sledgehammer rock of Spirit Caravan. Wino is an archeologist of heaviness, so why mess around with the surplus of dredged up schlock like Staind and Slipknot when you can have a baptism of hot molten Wino?



THE OBSESSED: 1980s



In many interviews you have described seeing Black Sabbath as a 12 year old as an incredible moment, and it's obvious that it has influenced your music, but what about seeing the James Gang at age 11?

The James Gang are still one of my favorite bands, though I do have to say that the James Gang I saw was fresh after Joe Walsh had just left, so I didn't get to see the Joe Walsh James Gang unfortunately. But the version I saw was The Straight Shooter band. I don't know if you are familiar with that album.

No.

"Straight Shooter" is when they got this guy Dominique T to play guitar, a Canadian session guy. Later on he did Miami Vice and shit like that, but he was an amazing fucking guitar player. When I was 9 and 10, I used to go into the pizza joint and "Funk 49" was on the jukebox, and when I was 9 or 10, that was my favorite song. The guitar on that is amazing till this day. Everybody used to play "Funk 49" wrong, like every guitar player would try and play that song but they'd play it wrong. One dude finally showed me that part that goes… I've even seen Tommy Bolin videos when he was in the James Gang and he'd play it wrong. When I went to see the James Gang it was my very first live show. It was at this weird venue Shady Grove in the Round, and the stage was in the round and it was one of those that would slowly turn. So that was pretty wild.

You went with an older brother or sister?

Actually, I had an older friend, my neighbor. She was considerably older than me, seven years older, and she was pretty instrumental in turning me on to lots of stuff. She was an enormous Allman Brothers fan, so she turned me on to the Allman Bros.

You loved the Beatles partly because they were heavy and partly because they had a dark side.

I'm talking about "Happiness is a Warm Gun", and I'm talking about some of the stuff off of *Yellow Submarine*, like "Only a Northern Song". But what I also mean by darker is "In My Life", that kind of stuff. What I kind of meant was a non-happy kind of sound, like a melancholy sound. A lot of their songs could be a little bit gloomy to me. That's why I liked them. I was never a big fan of the really happy-go-lucky stuff, the Paul McCartney stuff, the "When I'm 64" shit. I mean I appreciate the genius behind it,

but it wasn't my favorite stuff. The George Harrison songs, stuff like "While My Guitar Gently Weeps", c'mon, that's not a happy song. I don't think so.

The song has a density to it also.

It's got a density. Like when I first heard the Plastic Ono Band's "Cold Turkey". That was a little post-Beatles, and I'm talking about the "Cold Turkey" single version, with Clapton on guitar… The totally raunchy fucking guitar. That was classic Ono Band. I was like into all the Beatles stuff.

Were you hearing this on FM radio, alongside Mahavishnu Orchestra?

I had Beatles records. The Beatles were the Beatles and I was 12 years old in 1972. And I was into the Monkees. The Beatles were a mainstream band. That was an easy band to be into when you were young.

But were you popping into record stores at age 12?

By age 12 I had already changed. I was into the Beatles from seven on. I was into them in 1969. They were influential. I listened to the *White Album* all the way up, like that song "Julia." I started getting into Sabbath and Hendrix kind of at the same time. Then I discovered Mahavishnu. But I have to tell you, since you're from Texas, that one of the turning points in my life was hearing Roky Erickson doing "Two Headed Dog (red Temple Prayer)." I'm a big Rocky fan. I had always wanted to learn more about the 13th Floor Elevators because of that one song. It's one of the first totally obscure rock songs I heard on the radio, and it made me realize that hey, there's more out there.

Back in the days of FM when they played deep cuts from the records, not just the singles.

Even into my teen years, believe it or not, there was a great radio station at one of the universities around here… At Georgetown University, which I think, if I'm not mistaken, is a Catholic university. There was a radical radio station at the university that had a very limited broadcast range, but I was lucky enough to get it where I lived. I remember they played the entire record of Budgie's *In For The Kill*. How off is that? I thought that was weird back then when I was fifteen.

Do you remember listening to it straight through?

Well, I was doing something very memorable at the time. I was actually in the back seat of a Cadillac.

You got into some trouble as a teenager, and became ward of the state?

I became ward of the court.

Was music some kind of safety net that you could fall into?

Music was totally there for me, a special place for me, even when I was locked up. I was a really big Zeppelin fan at the time, so especially songs like "The Rover" would do it for me. It would give me a thrill. I remember I had just gotten *Physical Graffiti* right around those times. I was real into the stuff, and was a major Jimmy Page fan. That stuff would get me through. I was still writing songs. I don't know if you are familiar with the Obsessed, but we did a song called "Freedom". Well, I wrote that song because I actually knew I was about to be incarcerated, and I was very angry.

OF COURSE, YOU HAVE JOHNNY ROTTEN WITH HIS LYRICS. I THINK THAT EVERYBODY FELT THE ENERGY WITH THE PUNK THING BECAUSE PEOPLE WERE PISSED OFF. OF COURSE, THE KIDS IN ENGLAND HAD IT A LOT WORSE THAN THE KIDS IN AMERICA, BUT THE KIDS IN AMERICA APPRECIATED THE ANGER TOO.

When did punk music begin speaking to you?

I was always into high energy music anyway. Before the punk thing happened I was already into the Stooges and the MC5. I was familiar with "Raw Power" way before the Pistols and all that. We were listening to the Dictators. We had them all. I had "Go Girl Crazy" and "Manifest Destiny." When "Bloodbrothers" came out it practically blew our mind. It's the quintessential fucking rock record. So we were already into the Dictators then discovered that Australian band the Saints. We had *(I'm) Stranded*, which I thought was okay, then *Eternally Yours* came out, which was a much better record. We were into Radio Birdman, the Saints, all that kind of stuff. Then of course the Pistols happened, who I dug, because I really dug that record. It's a rock'n'roll record. The sound is rock'n'roll. Of course, you have Johnny Rotten with his lyrics. I think that everybody felt the energy with the punk thing because people were pissed off. Of course, the kids in England had it a lot worse than the kids in America, but the kids in America appreciated the anger too. Right around that time, the Bad Brains started doing their thing. The Bad Brains were a fusion band from a bad part of the world out here. They started off in Prince George's County, which is really known for being a really rough police kind of county, with a lot of low income folks being brutalized by the cops all the time. The Bad Brains were basically these pot smokers and low life that never cut their lawn and lived in Prince George's County and played fusion. I have some really early Bad Brains stuff, and they're playing a song called "Redbone in the City," which is a total take on "God Save the Queen." They went radically from this progressive fusion band, to kind of imitating the Pistols a bit, then they realized that they needed to combine the energy of their fusion stuff with a dramatic punk delivery, so that became the Brains that we all know and love. Void was happening, Minor Threat was happening. I got a chance to see all that stuff first hand.

Your band the Obsessed were considered the Motorhead of the DC scene, metal guys who were respected by punks. Maybe even a bit like Thin Lizzy too, who the UK punks seemed to like.

I got to tell you though. A lot of people I know are head over heels Thin Lizzy fans, but don't like that sappy, sweet shit. On every record that they did there's so much bullshit you have to wade through to get to the meat. That's how I feel. Phil Lynott is a ballad writer, basically.

The first couple of records were very much prog rock.

Well, of course Gary Moore's first band, the original Skid Row, were an Irish prog band. The original Skid Row, that's some rare shit. Anyways, having that comparison is interesting to me. Basically it took us awhile to win the punks over. We had a singer for awhile who was kind of a punk singer, and he was way ahead of his time. He was always telling me to do this or that, and he was the guy who got me to change my long hippie hair style into a more modern cut. He had this cut off leather jacket and this leopard skin bandana way before Stiv Bators. We played shows opening for the re-formed Dead Boys.

How were those shows?
They were pretty radical because we still weren't 100 percent accepted by the punks back then. They loved our originals, but they hated the fact that we played punk rock covers. We were kind of outcasts then, although we had a big suburban following who would come to these shows downtown with all these punks. So the crowds would pretty much clash. Once we canned our lead singer, and went down to a three piece and played all originals, that's when Iron Cross started liking us and playing shows with us. That's when I became friends with John Stabb and we played with Government Issue. That was when Ian started paying attention.

Once you went out West and started singing for St. Vitus, did you have to win over audiences much like you did in D.C.?
It was hard man, it was hard. It was hard going. We played really small shows. I missed touring with Black Flag. Before I joined St. Vitus, they toured with Black Flag. I wasn't there for that, but I joined soon after. Our first tour we did was with the Mentors in 1987, and those shows were pretty big. But no one knew who we were, but we were fucking kicking ass. But it was weird, because no one knew who the fuck we were. The record with me on it wasn't out yet, but they had had a couple of albums, but it still was a total struggle on the way up until *Thirsty and Miserable*, when we got our first overture from Europe.

The label Hellhound from Germany?
Yeah, they wanted to bring us over. We had a little following over there. When we first went over to Europe that's when we realized that there was life out there, that people were into St. Vitus. We were actually doing some pretty big shows.

Later on with the re-formed Obsessed, you played a crazy big show in Denmark?
85,000 people.

Did that blow your mind?
Yeah, it blew my mind, but it was also incredible because it was one of those picture perfect gigs. You were set up for all kinds of nightmares because the thing was so big. We had a soundman with us because we were on tour at the time. Basically, we had a picture perfect set. It couldn't get any fucking better. I had perfect sound on stage. I was like a mile away from everybody up there, but could hear perfectly. We were really in tune, and everything was groovy. It was one of those magical shows. I saw Kyuss later on that day have a terrible show, basically fold after about three songs.

What about Danzig and Prong?
Prong got the power shut off on them. Danzig was a real prick. You have to remember that it's a festival. So there's 30 or 40 bands each day. They had these auxiliary classroom type buildings set up for dressing rooms, so everybody had their own dressing room. Danzig had his own private dressing room, but had his thugs go back one point during the show way before he even played and made everybody leave their dressing rooms, and cleared out all these bands' dressing rooms, and never used them. We were told, "you have to get the fuck out." And they stayed empty.

I WAS REALLY INTO THE MISFITS MORE THAN SAMHAIN, BUT THEN I HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO MEET HIM AT AN EARLY SHOW... DANZIG PUT ON THE SHOW. HE AND BRAIN BAKER, THEY WERE JUST COCKS TOGETHER.

He was such a prick. People started leaving when he was playing, and they shut the power off on him because he played too long. He is just a cock.

Were you into the Misfits and Samhain?
I was really into the Misfits more than Samhain, but then I had an opportunity to meet him at an early show with the Meatmen. The Obsessed played with Tesco Vee in New York City at some club, and of course, we were hated by the punks. Danzig put on the show. He and Brain Baker, they were just cocks together. Brian is one of the most arrogant people you could meet, and he'll deny his whole role in Junkyard.

Now the critics call St.Vitus seminal and prophetic, but why did it fly over people's heads at the time?
That's a really good question. I don't know why that is, maybe it's because the younger generation of kids is just now catching on. I think that's what it is. I don't know how old you are, but St. Vitus was doing that shit in '87. It's been thirteen years. Who do they find out about St. Vitus from? From the Eyehategod guys? I think those guys are responsible for turning a lot of people on to St. Vitus because they'd always wear Vitus shirts, so there's kids coming up around that kind of vibe, like Eyehategod and Soylent Green. Eyehategod has been around for a long time. The guys in Corrosion of Conformity would have St. Vitus stickers on their guitars way back in the early days. Kids after awhile got tired of trash, maybe their minds are a bit more open to things that are heavier. I don't know. I'm not going to complain. It's just the way it is.

SST probably still has all the St. Vitus in print, but they are not in the stores, so kids have to go out and find them, perhaps online. But do you wish they might be repackaged and somehow get back in the stores?
I would love to see them more available. I don't make a dime off any of that shit. Gregg Ginn is running that show, so you can guarantee that it's going to be hard to get that shit. He's out of his fucking mind.

In what way?
He fucking mismanaged SST. He stabbed his friends in the back, like the Meat Puppets and Sonic Youth. He took them to court. He fought his friends in court. SST never fucking payed any royalties. Why do you think SST folded? Because instead of paying attention to Husker Du, Meat Puppets, and Sonic Youth, they fucking signed Run Westy Run and the Tar Babies and all that crazy shit. It's a classic situation. They'd be like, yeah we got five debuts this month. Yeah, that's great, but what about the fucking royalties?

When the Obsessed reformed, did you imagine it would be so short-lived?
When we got the Obsessed back together I really hoped it would be the real deal. We had no idea at all that we were in line to get signed. The guy from Columbia contacted us, but it ended up being a kind of nightmare at the time. But that's a whole other story.

They actually wanted you to re-record your music?
They wanted us to re-demo shit to be more radio-friendly. That's just not my way. I've never fucking sold out, and I never will.

Of course, there's definitions of selling out, but I would never compromise my integrity to make some prick happy.

After the band broke up and you had a few years of substance abuse and overall bad times, you went back to Maryland.
I took a Greyhound bus.

What were you thinking on the bus?
I had lost everything, so I was ready to start over, but at the same time I was still drinking.

That's when you took a couple years off from music?
I had actually taken a couple of years off before. When I got back to Maryland, I cleaned up my act pretty quick.
I partied a little while, but there were a few instances out here that made me realize, this is bullshit. So I quit drinking, and when I quit drinking I started getting strong again, and got all my willpower back and quit everything. I never liked heroin, and that's my saving grace. Everybody I know that did heroin is dead or in jail. I was more into going up instead of going down. So I never developed a big heroin habit, I never had that problem. I took a real heavy trip and did some serious soul searching under a very heavy dose of natural psychedelics, which allowed me to phase out certain things that were blocking me, and that was good.

That was the point when you met the new era of bands like Clutch?
When we put the band together, we started getting out and playing shows with bands like Clutch.

Under a different name?
Yeah, we were called Shine, the same band, but we just ran into a trademark problem with the name. Clutch took us out. They're a great band.

You knew exactly what you wanted?
At that point I was full-on into it. I was back into playing. I also knew that my music meant a lot to people, and my music meant a lot to me. So all the years I was down, those are lost years. It's all about the right people. You can't be happy playing in a band without the right people. When I met the guys, we kicked it around, and felt it worked real good, and it went from there. I never looked back. It was like a natural thing. It happened pretty fast, and it was good. We put a lot of fucking hard work into that band from the beginning. I mean, we rehearsed four or five nights a week every week.

And you met up with Joe Lally (Fugazi)?
Joe's a good friend of mine, even before Fugazi. He rented a room in my house back in the Obsessed days. He was an Obsessed fan, and really appreciated the stuff. He turned me on to Joy Division, and I turned him on to "Raw Power." We had that kind of relationship. And he was always a very responsible guy. I rented him a room in my house because I knew he'd pay rent. I was kind of intrigued, because he was a very cool painter. He was into Joy Division and stuff like that. He told me he wanted to play bass, and we talked about what he should get, and whatever, and it was all good. When I came back, he was like, this is cool, I would really like to put out a single. I got a label called Tolotta that puts out singles. Would you like to put something out? So we put out that single, and that's all he ever wanted to do, but it was so well-received, he thought, this is cool, maybe I can make it into a real label, then of course we recorded *Jug Fulla Sun* (2000). It's really interesting because our lives have intertwined in such a cool and unique way, all the way back when he didn't play, up through the time he's played in Fugazi.
I saw him play the other night in front of 1,500–2,000 people outdoors at the park. He just wanted to do something to make people aware of my music in some way, so we did the first single. It was received well, and we said, this is cool. That's when he realized that this label thing was a serious thing. We have a great relationship. I have to tell you, my professional relationship with Joe is amazing because basically we made an agreement that if we ever needed lawyers, then we didn't want to do it. We don't have any contracts between us, but when he sends me a statement, he sends it on time. It's accurate, and I trust him 100 percent. Basically we have a 50/50 deal with him, which is unheard of. It works out great for everybody. We did a one off for Meteor City. That was all good, it was with Joe's permission. I thought that Chad was a really cool guy, I thought they were really on the forefront of the Stoner Rock thing when they released their first comp.

WE HAVE A GREAT RELATIONSHIP. I HAVE TO TELL YOU, MY PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH JOE IS AMAZING BECAUSE BASICALLY WE MADE AN AGREEMENT THAT IF WE EVER NEEDED LAWYERS, THEN WE DIDN'T WANT TO DO IT.

You had a cut on that?
Yeah, we had a cut on that. No, we didn't have a cut on that, we had a cut on the European one that followed. Anyway, I was impressed with Chad and what he was trying to do. He was breaking new ground and putting out these obscure bands that were really cool, like Lowrider, Fatso Jetsam, that kind of thing. He was like, man, I really want to do something. I was like, what do you think Joe? And he was like, why don't you give them an EP, so I gave him the EP, and it did great, and then Chad decides he needs European distribution, so he wanted to go with Century Media, and everybody was like, no, no! Bad idea, look what happened to Eyehategod, bad idea. Don't do it. He ended up doing it anyways. It ended up being a totally bad deal for him. I just got my statement from him. We sold 1,500 records over there, and we made like 700 bucks or something like that. And now he's like, yeah, yeah, I'm trying to get out of the deal. But basically, it sucks. Here's what happened. We agreed to do this one off with him, and it was fine until they went to Europe, because Century is a terrible company to work with. We're getting paid these ridiculous low rates, and Chad got taken to the cleaners. And what happened to us? We got no advance, when he licensed Dreamwheel to them to manufacture, we got nothing, so they got a free fucking product. They're over their pressing the product with the fucking devil emblem on it and we're getting 50 cents a copy. It's totally fucking lame. One problem was I went along with Chad's licensing idea, even though I told him it was a bad idea. And it was a shady deal. That's the kind of shit I don't have to go through with Joe. I don't have to go through any of that crap with him. All that mumbo jumbo is gone. It doesn't exist.

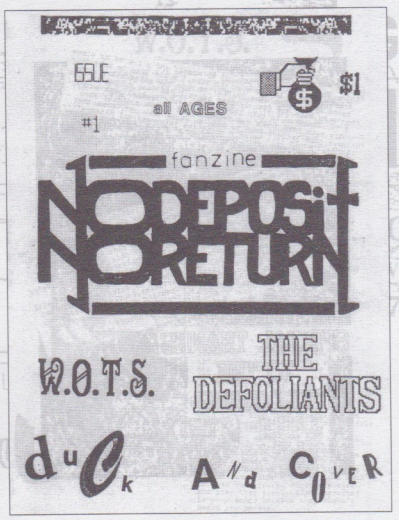
FLASHBACKS WITH YOUTH OF TODAY AND NOFX

My lead designer was wary and reserved about incorporating these articles. "What will the bands think? Let's not put it on the front cover." Fine. They're holdouts, really. Fifteen years ago I was a stubborn teenager with shaved head and blond bangs. "An Oi girl cut," my brother would snicker under his breath. I convinced my dad over homemade, out-of-the-box Sunday night pizza to let me use his company's huge copy machine to let me print a fanzine with me as editor. I had the timely and ridiculous alias Diehard Dave that I think was handed down from my first hardcore band in 1985 called Vital Signs. My first issue, barely legible, had a Chicago surf band called the Defoliants, who used to play the skating rink down the street from my house, a few newspaper clippings about punk rockers, and photos of local bands and Flag of Democracy, a whirlwind East Coast hardcore band. Issue two had a photo of Henry Rollins on the front cover (though only a show review inside, no interview, an old trick), an article with George from Positive Peer Pressure, who made all those cheap and loud looking straight-edge shirts that ended up on bands like Bold, Uniform Choice, and others, and Darren Mock, editor of the seminal Oklahoma fanzine No Loitering. He later ended up as the throbbing bass player of Verbal Assault during their post-Giant years. The 75 copies I made went fast, or I just dumped them someplace…I can't remember.

I made the rounds of local punk shows, and befriended a short guy named Tad, who was the connection, and had black Doc Martins shoes that I wanted to own real bad. He booked bands, like Kingface and Youth of Today, and they'd stay in his house (Ray even wore Tad's black leather shoes on stage), so I got to know him. Before long, I started my own band called Honeycomb Hideout, and Tad and I were going to combine forces and jointly put out a fanzine called Attempt, but it never got slipped into the Xerox machine due to a cash shortage. Tad went on to publish an issue or two of Word Up, featuring casual and off-hand interviews with Public Enemy and 7 Seconds, but Attempt remained in my parent's cement basement until now. I am publishing a small portion here, and in the next few issues for both an archival and commemorative purposes, plus I love the stuff.

Tad interviewed Youth of Today, I just took them out for bean burritos (without cheese), played basketball with 'em, and strummed an acoustic guitar with Ray (no kidding) and played bongos. He ate a big bowl of cereal with bananas late at night, and *gave me a Hare Krishna paperback cookbook.* Months later, I turned vegetarian for good. I interviewed NOFX at my friend Jeremy's house, where his mom fixed them a veggie pizza they practically laughed at. I traded their guitarist my leather Nikes for their *Liberal Animation* album, and filmed their show for them on an old mod-looking video camera. Heck, I even showed the drummer how to thrown down some heavy paradiddle action on the cymbal and snare as he told me how weak the Beefeater drummer was live.

I hope you enjoy these pieces from my punk diary. In the future, look for Soulside, Psycho, Kingface, SNFU, Life Sentence, and Verbal Assault.







NEW YORK CITY HARDCORE!x

XXX

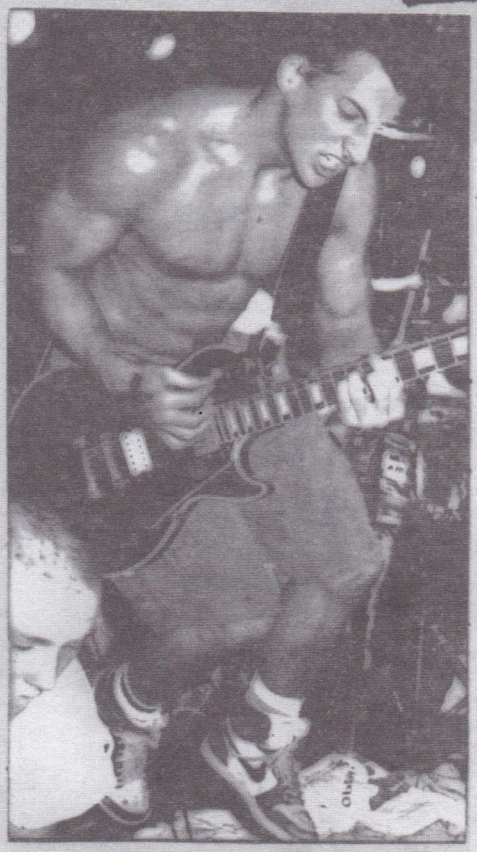
YOUTH OF TODAY

XXX

NEW YORKS HARDEST!x

'87 Vintage 'View

WE'RE NOT IN THIS ALONE





U-What are yoiur influences?
P-Our influences, Everyone always ask's us that, early SSD early DYS, old New York bands and stuff.
U-Is that what made you pick up the guitar and play?
P-Well basicaly Ive always been listening to punk, like even when I was in 7th grade Sex Pistols and stuff, I just basicaly always liked underground music, it's my biggest influence. As far as the style of our band goes it's mostly old New York and Boston bands.
U-I've heard that all of you are vegitarians.
R-We are vegitarians. Basicaly we all try to eat good, health foods and stuff, vegitarian food.
P-It's hard to eat good on tour when the only place to eat is 7-11's and rest stops.
R-So we do the best we can. We're very cautious though.
P-We try at least.
U-Peanut-butter & jelly?
R-All natural peanut-butter and jelly and whole wheat bread.
U-How are your record sales?
R-Records, as of now there are about 6,000.
U-What about the 7"s?
R-5,000.
U-I heard that there was some controversy about you guys repressing the 7" without POSITIVE FORCE's permision.
R-Yeah, I heard that to.
P-No way,
R-Who knows POSITIVE FORCE don't know, they don't know much.
U-Rumour's seem to follow you guy's everywhere.
P-It's wierd man wherever we play ther's always just a couple of kids who think that were assholes.
U-No really, there's alot of kids who think that your assholes. (laughter)
U-LIFE SENTENCE was saying something...
R-Fucking LIFE SENTENCE better watch there lip's. They've been slagging us from here to L.A.
P-You know what the deal is? We stayed at there house and they were so cool to us and everything...
R-Very nice & they came to New York and were very friendly with us and everything, and then...
P-And plus I here the person who is saying all this shit is there new singer that we've never met before.
R-Who cares let them talk. Ok what else have you heard?
U-Just about repressing the singles we heard you really dicked around POSITIVE FORCE.
P-No way
R-If anyone got dicked on that 7" it was us.
P-You know what we got payed for that 7"?
R-One hundred singles and we had to go down and demand money, so after we sold 5,000 7"s we only got 100 records and 300 dollars.
P-They sold 5,000 and the money went somewhere.
R-And actualy 50 we gave back to Kevin, so we only got 50 records.
U-Why?
R-We gave 50 back to Kev...cause thats how he wanted it.
U-So dealing with POSITIVE FORCE ain't the best then?

POSITIVE OUTLOOK

THROUGH THE CLOUDS I SEE THE LIGHT
MY CONSCIENCE TELLS ME WHAT'S WRONG AND RIGHT
MORALS AND GOALS DEEP INSIDE
A BUNCH OF FEELINGS I CAN'T HIDE, BUT THAT'S ME
IT'S THE WAY I LIVE
MY OUTLOOK ON LIFE IS POSITIVE!
SO WHY SHOULD I HIDE OR TRY TO CONCEAL
ALL OF THESE FEELINGS THAT I FEEL
I LIKE TO SIT AND TALK ABOUT THEM
I WANT TO STAND AND SHOUT THEM!!

TIME TO FORGIVE

IN THE BACK OF MY MIND,
IT KEEPS ME ON EDGE!
A SOUL FILLED WITH LOVE,
BUT I CAN'T HELP BUT FEEL CONTEMPT INSTEAD.

SO LET'S FORGET THE PAST AND
THE GRUDGES THAT WE HOLD.
IF YOU DON'T DO IT SO YOU
KNOW IT WILL EXPLODE.

LET'S SHAPE A BETTER WAY OF LIFE!
TIME TO FORGIVE!
I'M SORRY FOR THE BOTTLED UP ANGER.
WHAT WAS IT ABOUT?
IT'S TIME TO FORGIVE.
I'M GLAD THAT IT'S ALL OVER NOW!

WAKE UP AND LIVE

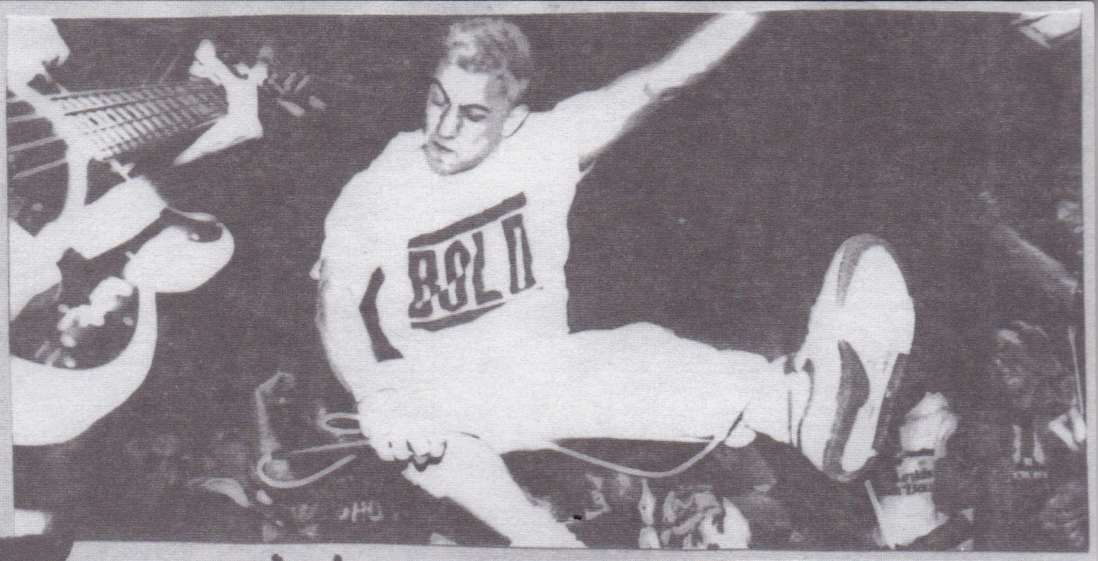
Wake up and live your life
See what there is to see
I won't sit around all day
'cause life means more to me

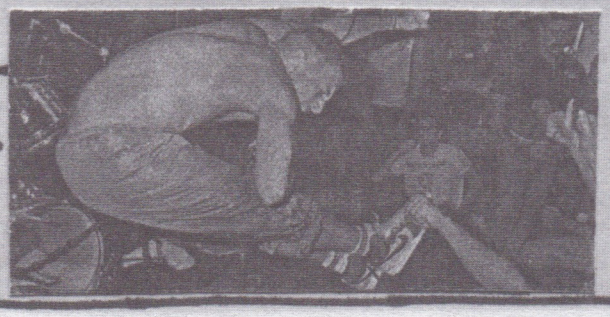
So many kids content
to sleep their lives away
But I'm gonna try
to make the most out of this day

It takes some motivation
It takes some love for life
Why just sit complacent
and let life pass you by?

Boredom is a choice
I choose not to make
unlock that door, strive for more
there's a better path to take

Wake up and live – breathe every breath
Wake up and live – until my death
Wake up and live so much to do
Wake up and live – all of you
c'mon...open your eyes.









R-It's just that they weren't to set up by then I'm not pointing any fingers. But we didn't rip them off, if any ones complaining I'm sure it's not Kevin.
R-Probably some little moron made it up...What else have you heard, more slander lets end all this once and for all.
U-Well I've heard, and I'm not accusing, that not all of you practice what you preach about the straight edge thing.
R-We're a straight edge band that's all I've got to say.
U-So the tour's been going goo...
R-I want to hear more rumours.
U-Well we can make up some stuff. We know it can get pretty lonely on the road and once in awhile you guys score on some chicks...No on each other(laughter)
R-There is so much shit.
P-I say before you judge us man fucking buy our record and fucking read our lyrics and meet us.
R-I tell you people are so quick to pick up rumours. Now you know the deal Tad we're nice guy's huh?
U-The nicest. What are your views on becoming physical? (laughter)
P-Like violence?
R-Like "punching" physical?
U-Yeah what's your limit to watching before you act or to how much you will take before you react?
R-It's different for all of us. I try to be overly understanding, I don't realy get to mad at people unless I just get caught up in an instant of rage. But then I'll regret it. But I don't like to hit anybody. But I think we all have different tollerence levels.
P-It's great to talk and work something out until it's one of your friends or somebodies realy getting hurt, or you get swung at.
U-I've heard you guys get mistaken for a skinhead band alot.
R-Fuck, everyone thinks that we're a skinhead band. We're a band for everyone, we don't just play for straight edge kids we just play for whoever likes hard-core. I mean we're all straight edge, but what is straight edge realy, I mean my Mom is straight edge (laughter) we just play for everyone.
U-Each person has a different level.
R-Right each person has there own idea of straight edge. I just think the whole straight edge straight edge thing is very personal. I just think being in moderation with your whole life and with every aspect of life is very necessary, otherwise you become an extremist and you become sort of off the wall. The rest of the band has a little more militant views than I do. But... (Walter enters) What's up Wally? This here is Wally our bass player, what rumours have you heard about Walter? Walter they hear I'm a drunken bum.
W-Lies a filthy pack of lies.
U-Ray's a drunken bum and he steals records from POSITIVE FORCE. (laughter)
W-Every straight edge band gets that though.
P-Like Ian's a crack addict.
W-Everyone gets that.
R-So Tad what did you think of the show?
U-Inspector 12, Underdog, and you guys were all great, But the

band that wouldn't play for scum, I don't know about.
R-THE BAND THAT WOULDN'T PLAY.....
(Everyone)-UNIFORM CHOICE!!!
W-It was too hot.
U-Did you see the shit going on outside, breaking beer bottles, fights?
R-Hey it's part of punk rock man. (laughter)
U-That one old lady was so mad.
R-I would be to, those kids are a bunch of pigs. (laughter)
P-Didn't someone put a rubber on her doorknob?
R-This punk stuff has gone to far.
U-Well let's cut right down to it then...Do you think Eddie Van Halen is a good guitarist?
R-I can't stand Eddie Van Halen. How bout that, huh, cause I don't like his hair. (laughter)
U-But he cut all his hair like yours.
R-Eddie did, realy? Well... I don't like his bellbottom pants.
U-He don't wear bellbottom pants.
R-I don't like him! I don't like him! Next question.
U-What kind of grades did you guys get in school.
R-I was in the honors society.
U-Doesn't Richie have like the highest I.Q. in the state.
R-What, did he tell you that?
U-No Siv. (their roadie)
R-Well Siv's Richies chearleader.
U-Well whatever the case it seems that you are all intelligent tallented human beings. (were their cheerleaders)
R-Thank you.
P-Thaaank youuu.
W-Tanx.
U-What do think about using chemicals to dye you hair?
R-I don't like to do it.
P-He uses beer.
R-Organic wheaty crest bleach.
U-Are you guys into sports?
R-YEAH!!!
W-Except for football.
R-We all love football except Walter. Basketball, whiffleball, bowling.
P-Bowlings the big one.
R-Jogging, weight lifting, wrestling, I love all sports.
U-Do you guys know the CRO MAGS?
R-Yeah we're good buddies wit da MAGS. We dig them they dig us.
U-What about religion?
P-We're all open minded.
R-We're all thinkers.
W-I don't think that any of us are strict Christians, Krishna's or strict anything.
U-All right, any closing comments?
R-Make love with me not war with me.
P-Look for what's inside before you make up your mind.
U-Wait what's your real name?
R-George of Today but I changed it to Ray cause it rhymes better.
xxxx

NOFX



NO-FX was interviewed the day after they played Rockford on the 22nd.If you have not had the chance to see these guys live,get off your but and catch them on tour!They are one of the most energetic bands around and just tear up with their thrashy punk sound that just leaves ya wondering how they can do it for an hour straight!Present at the interview was David, Jeremy,Chris,and Bob.NO-FX is:

Sal Lyva-Lead Guitar
Darryl Licked-Drums
Eric Melvin-Rhythm + Accoustic
Mike Rabbsitch-Bass and Vocals

Attempt-How long is this tour going to last?
Mike:It's almost a three month long tour.
Attempt:How did you set it up,independently or through a promoter?
Mike:We did it.Everything.I made all the phone calls.
Eric:I sent out all the press kits and records and wrote all the songs .I take care of all the mail.
Attempt:What brought about the change from Mystic to your own label?
Mike:Mystic sucks!!Our label is great!
Attempt:How do you go on about getting your own label and so on?
EricYou just get some money and record your own record,master your own record,press your own record,make your own cover and press it, and then you have your own record.
Attempt:How much did the new album cost?
Mike:It cost us four grand for the first two-thousand.
Attempt:Who is distributing it,you guys?
Mike:Caroline,Important,Rough Trade...
Eric:We sell them to Important and the rest. We also sell to European distributors.
Mike:There is lots of them.
Eric:It's great because we can put them anywhere we want,we can sell them to whoever we want,we can bring along as many on tour as we want.
Mike:We get all the money,that's the best part.
Attempt:You have been together for four years?
Eric:Longer.We've been on tour for four years.
Mike:This is our fourth nation wide tour.
Attempt:What's it like being on tour for four years and still doing the same type stuff each time?
Mike:It's allright.We'll get out sooner or later.We are going to get to Europe real soon and that will be fun.We're different you know. It's not like Agnostic Front or D.R.I. where it's like a business.
Attempt:What about line-up changes in these past four years?

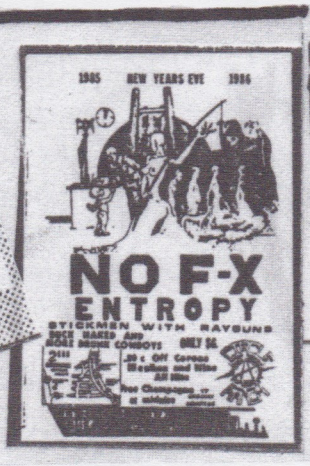


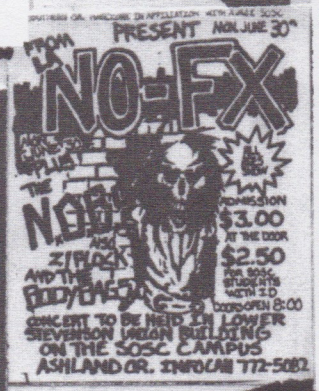


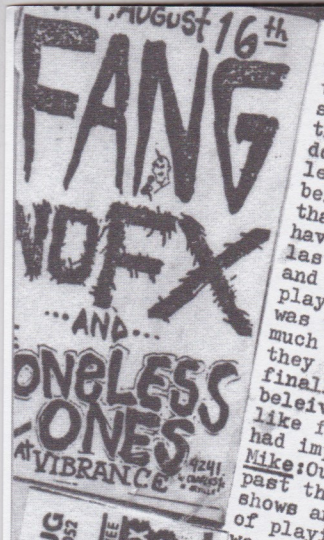


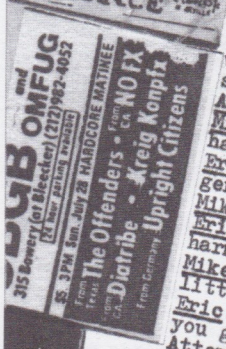
Attempt:Have there any line-up changes in these past four years?
Eric:It's been pretty much the same.
Mike:There is three originals.We just got Dave(Sal) for second guitar.
Eric:We had a replacement drummer for one tour.It turned out to be a mistake,kinda a waste of our time.
Mike:He was kind of a jerk and he wasn't any good.We had fun though.
Attempt:Where do all you guys live?
Mike:Two of us live in San Francisco,one in Hollywood,and one in Oxnard.This is all about seven hours apart.We don't practice unless we have a show or a tour.
Eric:If there is a three day weekend we try to get together to jam and work on some new songs or something.
Attempt:Why is it that you tend to take a more fun approach to playing than a serious outlook?
Darryl(Eric)-Because it's fun!!
Attempt:You don't seem to push any views.
Mike-We do push our views!
Attempt:Such as...
Mike-Anti-vegetarianism.
Darryl-Me and Terry don't eat vegetables.
Mike:Actually we push a lot of views,especially against people who think they are righteous.
Eric:Mostly that's it.
Mike:People who think they are better than kids who do this and that,but they aren't,they are just stupid.People like to label themselves a lot and it's pretty ridiculous.They have all these labels you know.I don't do drugs but I don't say I'm s/e,I'm a vegetarian,I'm a peace punk.You people are fucked because you are drunk and starting shit,those kind of people suck.Shit,what's punk rock all about?
Eric:We would probably be a lot popular now if,in the beginning,we had said we were s/e or something.
Mike:That's what pisses us off,all these bands like Doggy Style and shit.We used to headline with all those guys and now they get some gimmick going,it's all a gimmick.All those s/e bands are so big now because it's a fucking gimmick.
Eric:We played with all of them.
Mike:A lot of kids can relate to being s/e,that's why they get so big so fast.
Eric:We have played with so many of those bands, not that they are all the same,but they are not very creative music wise and all.There is nothing to it.
Mike:Look at the Crippled Youth single,it's ridiculous.It's the worst single I've ever heard in my life and people are like,oh yea man,it's so rad!They have nothing to say and their music is terrible.











Eric:Personally I have nothing against people who are vegetarians.If they want to do that then I am happy for them if they want to do something and are going through with it.If they don't want to drink beer,smoke pot,or do drugs and they make that decision,good,at least they made that decision rather then being and doing nothing.Some bands though, that's their only means of popularity,they have nothing else to say.When we were is Boston last year we heard Uniform Choice on the radio and it was the most ridiculous thing,they were playing some of their old stuff and then UC was talking about how their new stuff was so much better and more musically talented,and they went on and on about this.When they finally played their new stuff,we couldn't beleive it,we just looked at each other.It was like fuck,I can't beleive they had said they had improved two hundred percent.

Mike:Our problem is the NO-FX problem.For the past three years we just got too drunk at our shows and fucked up,so now we have a reputation of playing real sloppy live.This year I think we are better,we try not to drink before the shows.

Attempt:How did NO-FX come up with their style?

Mike:We have a couple of influences,we really have an RKL influence.

Eric:Plus we try to write stuff that doesn't have generic riffs and shit.

Mike:I think our stuff is real original.

Eric:We are trying now to incorporate some harmonys,maybe even some singing harmonies.

Mike:Our speed has changed and our style a little bit,bringing about better songs.

Eric:The more song writing you do,the better you get.

Attempt:What's the new vinyl put out by Mystic with NO-FX?

Mike:They are just five unreleased songs that we didn't put out.Two years later now,they put out a record ~~out~~ of songs we never wanted out.

Attempt:What about the deal with Alchemy?

Mike:Yea,we were signed to Alchemy.

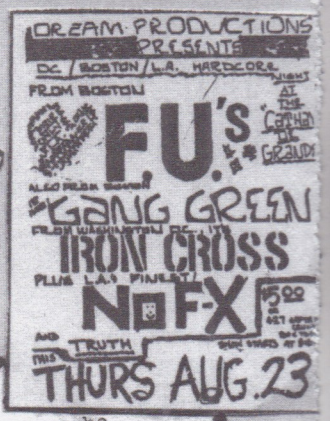
Eric:They ran out of money.

Mike:We had the contracts and all but one night after a gig at Gilman St. we said,fuck it,we'll put it out ourself.

Eric:We borrowed the money from Mike and recorded it,that's when I talked to Doug Moody and that's when he said that so many people liked that skull design that they wanted to put out an l.p. just in Europe.

Mike:But then they put it out in the U.S.





Attempt:What's Doug Moody like?

Mike-He's sixty years old.

Eric:He's a nice guy,he doesn't hate us,he likes us.It's two guys trying to distribute like 300 7in.s and 30 12in.s on their label. It's Doug and his mom and Bill

Mike:Doug's mom is a big help.

Attempt:Do you guys work?

Mike:Eric's a bum,Dave(Sal)has a job while Eric and I go to school.

Attempt:Where did the name come from?

Mike:That's the funny part!Eric and Eric(Darryl) were straight edge and I wasn't,but they came up with the name.

Eric:We were mixed up in that whole thing.I'm not saying it was a mistake or anything but it's just kind of funny.

Mike:I hate the name!

Attempt:What did you want to call it?

Mike:Something puck rock name like Snot Babies or something.

Attempt:Who writes most of the songs?

Mike:I do.

Attempt:And music?

Mike:That too.

Eric:Sometimes he'll come up with this or that and we'll work it out together,but not really change,but add to it.

Attempt:What do your lyrics deal with?

Eric:Different things.

Mike:We have a song about crabs and one about censorship.We write about things we think about.

Attempt:What's your favored response from crowds?

Eric:People having fun,not sitting in the back or not reacting to anything.Alive people!!

Hey!!Get out your pen and write NO-FX at:

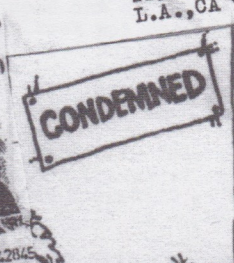
WASSAIL RECORDS/NO-FX
225 Irving
L.A.,CA 90004







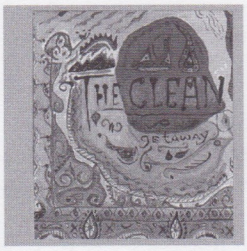






AN INTERVIEW

WITH



(DAVID KILGOUR)

OF

THE CLEAN

Before college geek rock and *Magnet* and *CMJ* magazine, before the nighttime noir and Hoboken twang of Yo La Tengo, before the lo-fi revolution fizzled into a cesspool of has-beens, before there were electronica DJs on every city block, there was the Clean, New Zealands's vanguard pop band founded by David and Hamish Kilgour. I sat behind the counter at Appletree records for restless hours with peanuts and orange juice dumbfounded by how a shitty, tin-can quality recording like *Compilation* (a collection of EPs and whatnot) could be so compelling…A few years later *Vehicle* popped up with a crystalline, shiny sound that almost betrayed how witty and gutsy the band still was. I forgot about them until Merge started throwing a few new records like *Getaway* at people. When I found out David Kilgour was coming to America first with Yo La Tengo and later to do a small solo stab at the East Coast, I jumped at an opportunity to milk some answers out of him.

The Clean arrived in the states to play eight shows this fall for the first time in ten years. How was the reception?
It was very good. We did a great show at the Bowery Ballroom in New York. We did a show with Apples in Stereo in Boston. We also did a show headlining in San Francisco at the Bottom of the Hill, which was a fantastic show, quite a surprise. It was sold out, and a very loving crowd. Our last show was in L.A., and it was good too, though a small crowd, but a really appreciative fan base.

Do you think people had gone out and bought the new record on Merge?
Yeah, sure. Then we returned five days later to New York and played a friend's wedding last Saturday night.

You played Maxwell's in Hoboken, which is Yo La Tengo's home turf. Did it create a more intimate vibe for you?
I think we always prefer to play in a smaller club. Absolutely, even when we tour in New Zealand now, years ago we would generally tour the large venues, but now when we tour we'd rather do two nights in a small club. We like to play small clubs because we play better and enjoy it more. We like to have a close intimacy, and Maxwell's offers that. It's a great club. The Clean actually played Maxwells about twelve years ago.

You have a great deal of material over the last ten years between your solo records and the Clean, so did you feel like you were filling in the gaps for people when you played in the States?
Not really. We make it interesting for ourselves, but at the same time we play a lot of the old songs. We pick songs from the last twenty years really. We mix it up. There's certain songs an audience might want to hear, but if we don't feel like doing them, we won't do it.

I WAS TRYING TO WALK A FINE LINE BETWEEN MAKING ACCESSIBLE POP AND PLEASING MYSELF, BUT ON THE NEW LP, I THREW ALL THAT OUT THE WINDOW.



Do you think that you would even have an audience if it wasn't for *Vehicle*, which many people consider your most accessible and successful?
I think that LP… Well, most Americans that I meet, or have met over the fifteen years or so, that it's the LP that tends to model the band. I think it did a lot for us in America.

What about worldwide?
Well, we touring quite a bit back then pre-*Vehicle* and then post-*Vehicle* we were actually quite popular in Germany. We spent a month just playing in Germany. The shows we used to do in the East Coast of the U.S. in the late '80s and early '90s were basically just stopovers on the way over to Europe. It did pretty well for us in Europe, especially Germany.

Has that German audience consistently stayed with you over the years?
I sincerely doubt it because I haven't been back to Europe but once. I really don't know, I couldn't tell you. Although Matador released my last solo record in Europe and they also released *Getaway*, but I haven't heard any word back. We don't have any management, we don't have any grand stand, we don't have any career stance at all. It's almost like a hobby for us, I mean it was a complete surprise that we toured here this year. As we finished this last album we discussed whether or not it was time to quit doing it. It was a difficult LP to make in a way. It's always hard, because Hamish lives in New York and when he comes back he has a limited time with the band. We talked about that, so I'm flummoxed that we actually made it back to America twelve years later.

Was the new record made like *Modern Rock*, which happened almost accidentally because everyone in the band ended up in Dunedin at the same time?
Well, Hamish had flown back to Dunedin for an art festival, and we decided to do a short tour of New Zealand while he's here. We weren't going to make an LP, we thought let's not make another LP, let's just tour. But in the rehearsal we had a four track and started to jam and before we knew, we made the decision to make an LP.

At the same time that Ira and Georgia were visiting New Zealand?
They were playing way north, about a three hour plane ride north of Dunedin doing a gig on their way to Australia and Japan, so they stopped off for three or four days before their gig really just to have a holiday.

How long have you know them?
The Clean toured Germany in 1989 and we ran into them there or in Amsterdam. I think they were staying at the same hotel, and we were aware that both bands had been on a Homestead compilation called *Human Music*. We already knew something about Yo La Tengo because they had already released an LP by then, so we talked and connected, and I've known them since then.

The Flying Nun web site says that the "on again, off again nature of the Clean is by design." Is it really that intentional or just haphazard?
It's purely coincidence that we end up in the same city and the same time really. There's no plan.

Well, I'm sure people wonder why, since with one of your first singles, "Tally Ho", you went to number 19 on the New Zealand music charts.
Sure, obviously with that first line-up of the Clean we were exceedingly ambitious. We were quite organized in our own cottage industry way, but since the early-'80s it's been a stop start thing. But with that first line up we were very ambitious.

Would that same kind of ambition today make the Clean less interesting for you?
I don't think so. We have a pretty good way of working with each other. We don't take any music into our rehearsal space. We try to write spontaneously. I mean, if *Getaway* does really well, we'd consider making another LP, but at the moment I can't see it. But who knows? Whether we'd get serious about it… I really don't know. We have our own lives that we live, and we have our own creative projects going as well, so who knows.

What kind of challenges do your solo records present?
Well I guess that the first three that I made were vague attempts at making commercial pop rock LPs. I was trying to walk a fine line between making accessible pop and pleasing myself, but on the new LP, I threw all that out the window. I decided this time I should be selfish. I recorded most of the LP at my home. I basically just had a collection of songs I've done over the last four years.

The new solo record is much more varied than the Clean record. For instance, you have everything from cinematic-feeling instrumentals, to acoustic tracks, to drum'n'bass beats.

I recently installed a 24 four track studio in my house. Quite a few of those tracks were experiments with my tape machine. With "Today Becomes Tomorrow", I was with a friend of mine who is an engineer and does a lot of drum and bass, and he engineered my solo records as well, but basically I used some drum tracks that my drummer had recorded on tape at my house that I was going to record some songs over it, but he basically turned out a whole piece of music and I just sang over the top. The whole LP is coming from different areas, like 4 track, 16 track, and 24 track, and some of it I wrote just 20 minutes before I recorded it, so there's a freshness to the tracks. A lot of it was recorded as soon as I wrote it. So I thought, this is good demo, I'll fix all this up and use some studio over-dubs, but at the end of the day I didn't, and I decided to just go for it.

Every song almost feels like a risk or a challenge.

I certainly didn't plan it that way. Like I said, it was a collection of songs that I like from the last four years. There wasn't an attempt to make it experimental, I mean I kind of did, but there was no conscious attempt to do it. Sure, I probably had grandiose plans at one point. At one point, it was going to be an LP with strings on it, but at the end of the day I became less anal about it and just gave in. I feel I can't help myself, because it allows me to do the things the Clean never allow me to do.

The site also says you come from the Brian Wilson school of songwriting, where "dumb is the essence of pop's appeal," but I don't listen to your records and hear anything that's very dumb.

That's a boring cliché, Brian Wilson. They also seem to drop the names Skip Spencer and Syd Barrett. Sure, I love the Beach Boys and Syd Barrett as a kid. I'm not sure I'm in the vein of any of those people. I mean I love them, but I love a lot of music.

Did you not say, "I am a sucker for sweet melodies?"

I hate (*laughs*) that quote. I said that in the early 1990s. I am a sucker for little sweet melody things…What does that mean? I like melody (*laughs*). Melody is hard. I do struggle with it.

How did playing with Yo La Tengo differ from your other experiences?

It's a lot harder playing somebody else's music, and that was a great challenge for me, and I knew it would be to do those shows, but I like to put myself in those situations. We only had like five days of rehearsal, though we knew what songs we were going to do many months before the tour, so it's not like we were getting up on stage without knowing the songs. But it was a really great challenge for me, and I did push the envelope of my playing ability. I learned a lot from doing that tour. It's one of the interesting experiences I've had actually. It was grand. Kinda stressful, but really satisfying.

How did you end up receiving the New Zealand Order of Merit?

I have no idea. Some one would have nominated me. A politician, somebody upstanding, obviously. Someone nominated me, but I have no idea how. It's not really a choice whether you want to accept it or not.

Do you see it as significant, or as vacuous?

It's always nice to get a slap on the back. You know, my mother was extremely pleased. It was funny, a few musicians that I never hear from out-of-the-blue wrote me and said that's great. I think that some musicians felt that it was nice to see the government say, well done. I think in a way it was a slap on the back of everybody.

It wasn't a slap on David's back as much as one on the back of musicians you grew up with and played with?

I wouldn't have gotten it without the Clean. But it felt kind of funny getting it without Bob and Hamish getting anything. But I did a lot of press, and raged on about things on TV, it was sort of on the news and stuff, so I tried to do my bit and rant and rave about the horrible the music scene was in New Zealand and blah blah blah, all that good stuff.

Is it true that the Clean were one of the first bands to play original music in New Zealand?

In the 1960s there were people writing original music. There were some great garage pop bands that came out of New Zealand. There's always been original music in New Zealand, but it was certainly nothing like us at the time when we started out making music. The first singles sounded like they were recorded in a toilet but were chartered without any hope of radio play. There were no college radio stations in New Zealand until the mid-1980s, so we toured without any radio play at all. We had videos, and they had to play them only because we charted. But we toured all the time in New Zealand, and people would go out.

THAT'S

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AND

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WE

ARE.



Did Radio Birdman reach the shores of New Zealand?
Radio Birdman certainly got through, but the Saints had a major effect.

With "I'm Stranded" in 1976?
It was a big album in the punk scene in New Zealand, but you have to remember that the punk scene mostly hit New Zealand probably two years after it exploded in England, so we were always a little bit behind. But we had a friend in Dunedin who was importing all those records, so two weeks after *Anarchy in the UK* came out, we were getting it in Dunedin. We were all avid vinyl collectors, and music collectors, especially Chris Knox, who was music obsessed. We were always paying attention to music.

It was a cottage industry that ended up being quite successful. Can a New Zealand band in 2001 do it the same way, and chart without radio play and get through to people and sell records?
It's still possible, but a hell of a lot harder.

What makes it harder?
The New Zealand music industry is in the saddest state it's ever been in. The corporations completely control it, even to the point of actually owning the media. New Zealand is a tiny country. There's only three million people that live there. So it's tough. But I still think it's possible to succeed on your own terms. Maybe not as easy as it was for us.

Were you listening to the Velvet Underground a lot?
We had already been listening to Velvet Underground before punk hit, via Lou Reed. Lou Reed was huge, like *Transformer*, and *Rock'n'Roll Animal*, so we found out about the Velvets through that.

Did Lou Reed tour New Zealand in the 1970s?
I saw him play live post-*Rock'n'Roll Animal*, the tour right after it. He came to Dunedin twice. The thing about New Zealand in the '70s and early '80s was that everybody came and played, I saw so some many people play as a kid in my town, from Lou Reed to Chuck Berry to Graham Parker and the Rumour. There was early Talking Heads, the Cure, it's hard to believe, but it's actually true. I saw so much music.

How did you and Hamish begin playing?
My mother played piano, but we didn't really pick up music at all. I think I was about twelve I tried to play the guitar, and Hamish did too, but we both gave it up because it was so difficult, but then punk rock came along to Dunedin and that gave us the excuse to pick up a guitar and play noise, so that's how we started. Sure, it was a punk rock thing.

When you play guitar today, is that still the vein where you are coming from?
I don't think we do it intentionally, but it's funny, we've met a few people on tours that come up and say, look, we're in a punk rock band, blah blah blah, I really love you guys. But I've never thought of the Clean as a punk band. Hamish told me the other day, David, we are. Maybe he's right, I don't know. I think there's still some punk music still in me, for we're rather shambolic live. We can be pretty pop, but we can also shred it and give it the right noise experimentation, so there's a punk attitude too.

What did you think about *God Save the Clean*, the Clean tribute album that had all small bands, even though bands like Sonic Youth and Pavement were fans?
I have a bad taste in my mouth about that LP, because we basically had nothing to do with it. I really liked some of the stuff on it, and I am flattered all those acts were on it, but I haven't heard of one-third of those bands. I think the guy who organized it got his friend's bands to play the songs. Quite a few of those acts I've never heard of before, but I am really flattered that they all wanted to do it. But we had nothing to do with it, though we asked to have some sort of input into it. But at the same time, I'm flattered.

Do you see yourself playing with more people beyond Yo La Tengo?
If I was asked, I'd play with anybody. I'd be willing to take on anything within reason.

What are you working on?
Well, I am going to go back to New Zealand on Sunday and start writing and recording again.

Do you think you could ever live in America?
Yeah, I could. I don't know how I would, because I would need a green card to do it.

What's appealing about living here?
Change, I'm a bit tired of New Zealand. I think change. I don't know if I'd live there too long, I'm not sure. I think change is good. I've been itching to live somewhere else for the last three or four years, and I think I am pretty close to coming here to live something like twelve months. We'll see how it goes. I really don't know how I would do it.

Is it easier to survive and make the music the way you want to in New Zealand?
Probably, but there's not a lot of motivation to do it in New Zealand since the way the music industry is set up. It's a lot more stimulating to be here in America and play and make music here. It's seems like such a larger country. Also, I now know so many people here now, a nice network of friends throughout the country, so it's a very appealing idea to come here. But I don't want to come here and be an illegal, what do you call it? I want like to do it legit, so I'm not sure how to do that.

There is a very strong cinematic feel to the instrumentals on the new record. Is that something you aimed for?
Not really, but I do like instrumental music.

Like what?
As a kid, I was a huge fan of Brian Eno, especially his ambient stuff. Then there's stuff like the soundtracks of Ennio Morricone, and I adore Jimi Hendrix, and a lot of his live stuff is instrumental music.

Can you see yourself composing for films?
I would love to. I've done a little bit for a friend's short movie a few years ago. I would really, like to. Yeah, I've had songs used in the odd movie or two in New Zealand, but I've never actually written anything, but I would really like to.

If you could name one major difference between you and Hamish, what is it?
(*long pause*). That's a very good question. He's got black hair and I've got brown.

That's it?
Off the top of my head. Yeah. We are very similar in many ways, but sure we have our differences, absolutely.

It's difficult to get the Clean records in America. At some point, will you try and buy the rights to the records and re-package them?
We've been trying to do that. It's looks like we've lost the old back catalog, though not all of it, but some of it. Since I've been here, we have been considering myself exporting *Modern Rock* and *Unknown Country* and doing it through Merge perhaps, or Hamish in New York. We're definitely considering doing it. The Clean is actually thinking about setting up their own label so we can release the stuff. I think we might be able to get our hands on *Vehicle*, because we co-owned it. I do remember having some dialogue with Rough Trade many years ago about it, but because we co-owned we need a signature to do anything with it. If he's got it, I'd be really pleased to get it. But we're going to release some stuff next year. We are going to release a much better Clean anthology on Flying Nun that hopefully Merge will release as well, and we have a really good live LP that we are going to put together and release in the next twelve months.

Not the live album from ten years ago?
No, though we'd like to get our hands on that as well. It's from some live shows that we recorded last year. We are really pleased with it.

So will you release the stuff that wasn't put on *Compilation*?
That's so outdated. I'm not sure what we'll do with that. The new anthology will be much more up-to-date and more cohesive and more of the tracks from the early days, maybe even all the tracks, because there aren't that many. And the other CD will cover what we call the reformed years.

What about video or film footage?
We have a lot, but that's way, way down the track. I don't think videos are big sellers, but there's a lot of stuff, even as far back as the late 1970s.

How did the Clean transcend "Kiwi Pop" and survive twenty years later?
I really don't know. This trip over we did very tentatively, we hadn't been here for twelve years and we didn't know what it was going to be like. We just did a few shows to test it out. We're still flummoxed by how many people have still held on to the love of it. There's been young people that we're meeting who have been coming to the shows, and people at radio stations. I don't know what it is. Maybe they hear the innocence of it all. I think Americans are also pretty turned on to the history of music.

Do you find that in other places?
Maybe not on such a grand scale. They are pretty turned on here. And I think there's a great love of garage rock too.

(END)

"We want to make records that we would listen to even if it wasn't our own band."

SUPERCHUNK

It doesn't matter whether you were passed out in your sloppy dorm room in 1991 with "Slack Motherfucker" buzzing on your cheap Wal-Mart cassette deck, or turned on by Superchunk's track on the garbage bin bound Jerky Boys soundtrack, these North Carolinians don't care. They've slapped "DJ killed indie rock" Europe across its pimply, soaked on E face, played every low-lit, moth-ball club in America that could withstand Mac's uncannily high-pitched voice, and worn faded Black Flag shirts while drinking ten cent beers with exiled Hollywood comedians on bourgeois college campuses. And their new record, *Here's to Shutting Up*, is golden, baby.

I listened to the new record next to *Incidental Music* and it seemed like night and day. Do you feel it's the most fully realized record you have done?

Tim: Yes, I think so, but I don't think it was planned that way. It's still just a collection of songs but it seems to have more of a floor than the last records, but I don't know. I really can't comment on that.

Mac: I think that part of it is that we limited ourselves to leaving ten songs on the record. The more songs there are on a record, the more chances there are for things to veer off. There's songs that you like, but they just don't fit in, so sometimes you put them on the record anyway. That can be okay, but at the same time, giving it a feel of being all one piece means making it a bit shorter, which makes it more cohesive I think.

In the past, you added the lyrics last. Was this record done differently?

Mac: It was pretty much done that way.

Why does that work for you?

Mac: Occasionally I'll just think of some lyrics and write them down without the music, but it's kind of hard to do that because so much of how the vocals and lyrics work have to do with what the rest of the song is like, you know what I mean? I don't have like a notebook of poetry that I am putting to music, it's more like there's a song that needs words. That's how it generally works.

Tim: The music comes about, what's a good word, spontaneously.

Independent of the lyrics?

Tim: Yeah.

Are the lyrics just the icing on the cake?

Mac: They are important, it's just that it's difficult for me to write them without the music.

Mac, do you still only sing the songs that you write?

Mac: Well, I pretty much write all the lyrics. I mean we do covers, I didn't write those.

Well, I know that. But if Tim wrote the lyrics, would you sing them?

Tim: I wouldn't write the lyrics.

Mac: Yeah, I think I would actually. But it seems to make more sense to sing what you wrote.

You just got back from Europe. Five years ago, you said rock was dead in Europe. Is that still true?

Mac: This was our worst experience so far.

Why?

Mac: You see, I don't remember what particular tour we had talked about before, but you just feel that nobody really cares that you are over there. We had a couple of good shows, like we had a really good show in Paris and in Rotterdam. But we went to Ireland for the first time, and nobody bothered to advertise. We had pretty good guarantees to come all the way over to Ireland, we added a few on at the end to play Belfast and Dublin, so you'd think they'd want to make sure that the shows did well, but for whatever reason, there was no advertising.

Did you get the vibe that rock'n'roll was has-been, so last century?

Mac: Not rock in general. The vibe I always get over there in general is that it is so flavor of the month oriented. You know? Whatever is the latest thing, whether it is good or bad, sometimes its good bands, but they don't want to know anything about a band that has been out for awhile and makes good records. They seem to be fickle. The bands that are new now won't be in a year and they'll want to know about something else.

Tim: At the same time, every show we played, the people that came were totally into us. Between 50-100 people were…

Mac: But it's a shame that you have to balance it in that way and you can't just say hey those thirty people had a great time in Amsterdam and we should be happy with that, but you still got to play a great show obviously, and few people went to some shows. At the same time, in order be in a band and tour all the time you really can't have real jobs. So you kind of have to make money doing what you are doing if you're



going to pay your rent. But when we go to Europe, we lose thousands of dollars. So, it is great that those 35 people had a great time in Nottingham

Tim: But economically it's not feasible to do it every year.

Mac: It's kind of deflating because its so much work to do that kind of tour, it's exhausting you know? You would feel it was worth getting sick and being tired all the time if people cared that you were doing it.

You've also said that people in America don't have band loyalty, they have song loyalty.

Mac: I think they have band loyalty, definitely more than Europe. I said to Gerard, who runs Matador, which is the label we are on in Europe, it's one thing to play a crappy show in Nashville on a Monday night because for some reason you know in a couple nights you will be playing Austin and that will be a really great show. You have things that you know are for sure in that way. When you're done with that show in Nashville with forty people or whatever, then it's like, you kind of know where you are, you know where you're going, you know how to get to the hotel, you're not lost in some European city for two hours trying to find a hotel and so confused because you can't read the street signs. It's less psychically draining to have a crappy show here than it is to have a crappy show there. We played a show the other night in Nashville, and there was something like 80 people there or something like that, which is a pretty depressing sight, but it still was really fun and friends of ours were there and it ended up being a good show actually. But I think it's easier to make that happen here than somewhere else.

Do you consider touring a necessity still? Can you imagine yourself like XTC where you don't have to play shows?

Mac: I don't foresee doing that if it wasn't your job. I mean Portastatic never plays live, we never toured the West Coast. I mean, anyone can make records and never tour but I don't think its possible in this country, or any country, to do that and sustain any sort of profile. I think we'd still have hardcore fans buying records but you're not exposing yourself to any new fans that way, that's for sure.

In 1991, you wrote the lyric, "everything is borrowed, everything used," so how do you make it feel new to you ten years later?

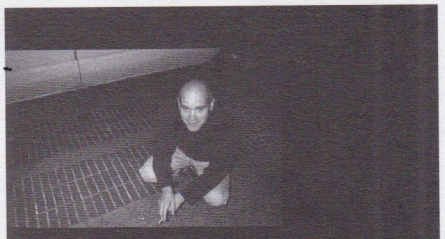
Mac: I think you have to do that with every record. You just do different things in the way that you write songs, like when we wrote songs for this record it was kind of the same as the last record, in that we were starting from scratch, coming to practice without any things we had worked out. We tried to write two new ideas for songs at every practice. And it kind of came out when we were recording everything. This time we had the keyboards set up and the acoustic guitar, and that was the element we were starting with. For me, at least, if I pick up an electric guitar that is different than my electric guitar, even that alone can make you play differently and make you write different kinds of songs, so having the acoustic alone helped us get different ideas and come up with different types of songs, and having the organ set up as well. In the past, we had keyboards mainly as playing other melodies, but not as the basis for the song. There are songs on the records that use keyboards, acoustic guitars, and keyboards, and that's definitely a first for us. That's one way of keeping things new, just writing on different instruments. It's the same four people and you are writing songs, but there's different ideas I think.

One of you said that being called old iron, or old stalwart, is not a flattering thing.

Mac: I think its nice that people look at the band, wow they're still good after being around for this long and I think it's cool that they're still together. But I don't like bands that have been around a long time and are just re-hashing what they've already done. But I think one reason that it's not flattering is like, you're not changing at all, it's kinda of like, you're the same band you were twelve years ago isn't that comforting. There's very few bands who can get away with doing the same thing over and over again. John is a big Ramones fan, I think they are one of the few. Old iron just makes it seem like you are inflexible, single-mindedly doing something without absorbing influences or without being flexible.

Six years ago, when you played the second stage at Lollapalooza festival and had some rotation with the "Hyper Enough" video, some people may see that as the peak of your curve in terms of exposure, but what do those moments mean to you?

Mac: I think to me, I think it was a peak in the curve in terms of the nation being willing to accept, well, not the nation, but the media, like MTV and stuff, being willing to cover things outside of the mainstream view of things. By getting that attention, even then, we made the "Hyper Enough" video and its not like we were on MTV all the time, it was just on *120 Minutes* a few times.



It's disheartening to struggle in the face of trying to have quality and thinking that will be reflected in some sort of reward, because there's not many rewards for being good.

Which has millions of potential viewers.

Mac: Sure, but at the same time, it's really hard to see…Well, I think it's one reason why people don't make videos anymore, I mean I'd be into having videos for songs off the new record, but it's expensive and it doesn't really reflect itself in record sales, so you're really not getting anything back, you're sort of pouring money down a hole. Unless you're just a filmmaker, and make videos for the sake of making videos.

Is the festival sort of the same thing?

Mac: But you get paid for that. You don't get paid for making a video. You just spend lots of money. I like it when I see good videos, and would like to be able to make videos, but it's just so expensive. I think we may put out a DVD of our videos, but most of them were never out on MTV. And it would be cool to have a new one to put on there with all the old ones, but I don't know.

Many songs on the new record seem to lend themselves to the idea of video.

Mac: I think it would be great to be able to do it, I just don't know.

Tim: But getting played on MTV is not about how good you are, it's about record labels, corporations, and people, anonymous pacemakers. It's disheartening to struggle in the face of trying to have quality and thinking that will be

reflected in some sort of reward, because there's not many rewards for being good.

What are the rewards for being good?

Tim: Satisfaction.

Mac: Yeah.

Tim: And knowing you had a career for twelve years and doing something you believe in doing and not having to compromise. The only words that you normally hear are accurate, like you go to bed at night and are comfortable with who you are.



Well I also don't think we're the kind of band that could have made a record that sounds like Blink 182.

Mac: Exactly. You get that satisfaction from making art. And every time you make a record, as long as you are making it the way you want to make it and it comes out the way you want it to come out, that's satisfying itself, because that artifact will last forever. Obviously, if that's all you were in it for, you'd never have to release your records you could just make them and work at a grocery store or something. But obviously part of what you are doing is that you want other people to hear the CDs

Tim: You want everybody to hear the CDs.

Mac: Yeah. You want people to come to shows.

You want the CDs, but not have to dirty yourself to get there.

Tim: You want to be successful doing what you want to do. You don't want to be successful doing something else when doing something else includes compromise. And I don't think it could have worked, I don't think we could have compromised. We didn't have anything to compromise.

Mac: Well I also don't think we're the kind of band that could have made a record that sounds like Blink 182.

For instance, your track on the *Jerky Boys* soundtrack sounds totally different than anything else.

Mac: True.

When you did the short tour with Yo La Tengo...

Mac: It was the whole country, except we didn't come to Texas. It was about twenty shows.

Did that feed into the way you made the new record?

Mac: I don't think it fed into the songs that we wrote, but in terms of this tour it definitely made me think it's possible to expand what you are doing live by bringing other people with you. I just saw how it worked for them. They made a record, and knew they weren't always going to have all these extra people with them, so they wanted to do one tour where they actually tried to recreate those songs live. It's not like when you go see Britney Spears and they try and make it sound like the record, they wanted to have all that was going on represented. The other is that it was a very fluid situation live, after a certain point, after everything is right, then its pretty improvisatory after that. Like we learned a lot of songs, but there were moments when we would go on stage for an encore and Ira would just say, we're going to play "Somebody's Baby," just play something on the vibes. Some of it was incredibly well learned, and some was totally made up on the spot. They managed to balance that pretty well. So doing that tour made me feel that there's a lot more going on in this record, and it would be great to have someone come with us to help play those parts, because we've done shows without, like in Europe when we were playing songs from the new record there's definitely parts that we miss. String parts, or whatever. We've known Annie for a long time. Jim went to college with her. And she's a great guitar player, and can learn things fast, she's great, and has a good mind for that. So I said, hey do you want to go do this tour with us? So it gave me ideas about how we can expand as a band. We're still the same band.

When a band like the Magnetic Fields does really well, does it lift everybody's boat on the label? Or do they forget about everything else?

Mac: Well, you know everybody is so unique on the label to a certain extent it is like that, because Steven Merrit is walking around saying I'm on Merge, he's such a unique person that its obvious that most people focus on the band. I do think it helps to raise the profile to the label to a certain extent. It's weird though. A lot of times I think the label actually gets ignored when a phenomenon like that happens. It's like, we put out The Trail of the Dead records, which got so much press and did well and they're a great band, but I read this article in Billboard where Jimmy Levine, the guy who signed them to Interscope, said I can't believe that they weren't signed already. I mean, I had to read about them in *Magnet* magazine. It made it out like they hadn't put out these other records, you know. Nothing of their past is mentioned. It's almost like he summoned them, or something like that, from the great void of unsigned bands. It's like well...They were kind of signed to a label. It's not that I begrudge them for going to Interscope, because they can do things that Merge can't do for sure, but that kind of attitude is annoying that you only exist to provide these other people with their next big thing. The Trail of the Dead doesn't see it that way, but Levine sees it that way. I think the whole level of the industry sees it that way. So it's frustrating, but generally I think when a band does well on Merge it does help everybody.

You are wearing a Black Flag shirt. Do you think Superchunk retains an element of that punkness?

Mac: If you're into rock'n'roll, part of that is the noise of it. The speed too.

There's something gratifying about it?

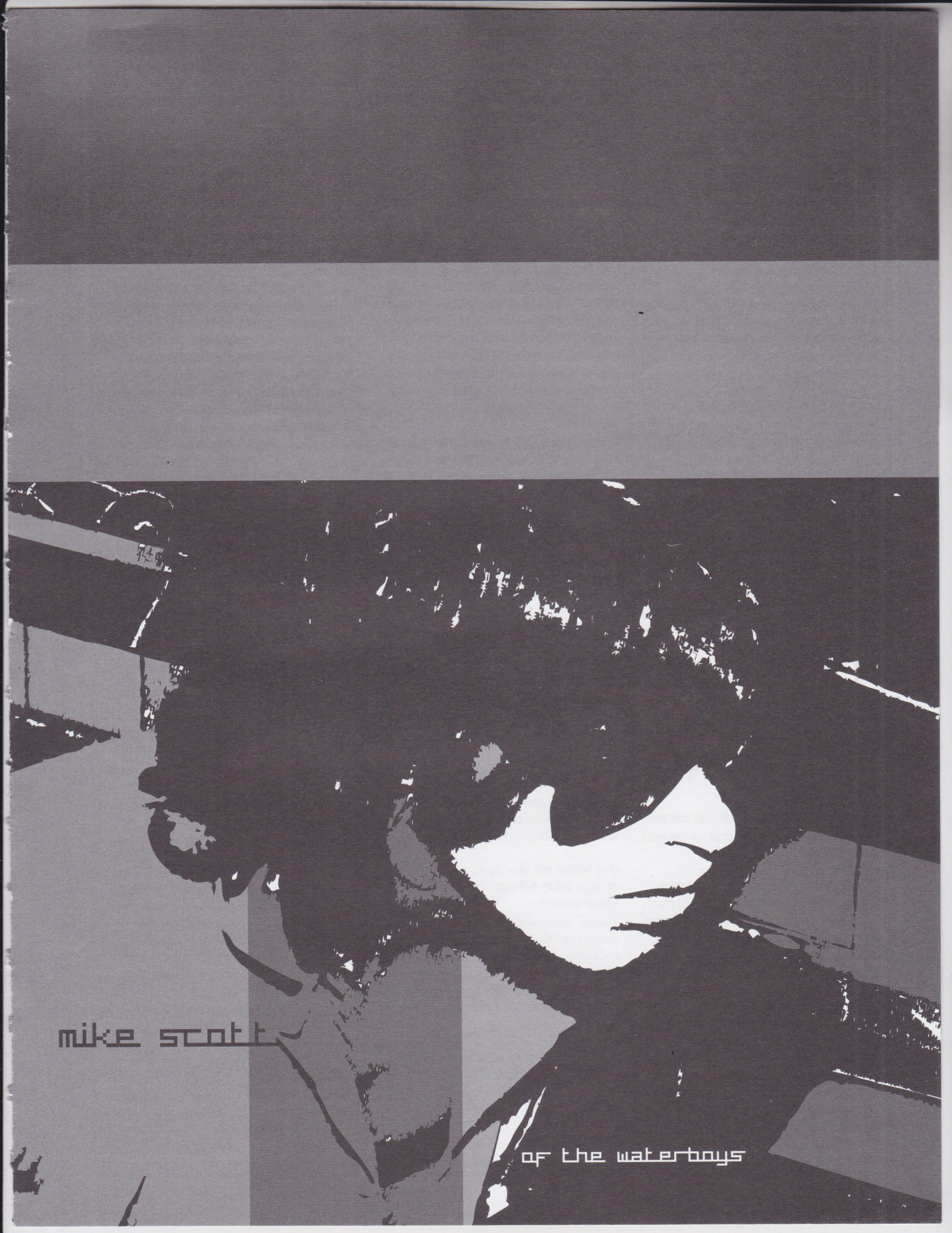
Mac: Yeah, it's fun. When I go see bands it's fun, and I like seeing quiet bands too. Especially playing live shows, its great to be able to mix it up and play quiet things and be able to rock out. I think noise is an important element of all our records, even the quieter ones.

But you've said, there has to be a song underneath.

Mac: Yeah, it's true. Hopefully when you come to our show now it's a much broader experience than it was eight years ago.

When you listen to the old records now, what do you hear now that you didn't hear then?

Mac: Well, I think I heard how badly I sang at that point, but there was nothing I could really do about it, so you're kind of like, that's fine, whatever. So that's one thing that makes me cringe a little bit. But you know, we still play songs from all our records, so hopefully that's a testament to the fact that even back when we started the songs were still important enough for us to not play three chords and not worry about what they were, even if it was loud we were concerned with having good lyrics. We wrote songs that we weren't going to end up being embarrassed about listening to. Our whole thing has always been we want to make records that we would listen to even if it wasn't our own band.


mike scott
of the waterboys

Why call the new record a Waterboys record, and not call it a Mike Scott record? Are there people who will buy it simply because of the name Waterboys?
Yes, because the name gets recognized.

But won't the fans of the Waterboys recognize the name Mike Scott?
No, I found that out the hard way.

Meaning that the sales of the solo records were a bit disappointing?
Oh yes. Down from the Waterboys, definitely.

On the new album you balance an epic, spiritual side with a confessional and intimate side. Is that how you see the record?
Well, I don't think of it in those terms, though I like them.

Well, how do you think of it then?
Well, I just do what I do really, and make the record as good as I can.

But how do you know how good it is?
Um, whether it turns me on or not, and this one really does. I like this record a lot, and I am very proud of it.

Would it be wrong for people to draw a line from *Dream Harder*, to *Still Burning*, to the last solo record in order to trace the sound of the new record, or do you think there's elements of your earlier work on it too?
I don't hear the early stuff on it. I think this record is a continuation of *Bring 'Em All In*. On that record, I began using distorted keyboards and a customized wah-wah pedal with a volume control type knob that I move very slowly by hand or even by foot, so I get much more control. I started using those on *Bring 'Em All In*, and they reach their peak on this record.

And is this the direction you will continue with?
No, I would think it will change on the next record.

For a few years you didn't listen to much new music, then a few years ago you started listening to Mercury Rev and Radiohead, and liked them because they showed you what was possible in rock music. So what exactly did they make possible?
Well, Radiohead's *OK Computer* reminded me to work on the sound of every instrument. I love that about *OK Computer*, every single instrument is an opportunity to explore sonically, and I wanted to do that.

I know you recorded *A Rock in a Weary Land* several times in the studio, so did they also show you how to explore each song in an infinite number of ways?
No, it was more like I was recording certain songs three or four times just to get the right version, just to really nail it.

How do you know when you are satisfied, when the fourth take is better than the third?
No, I wasn't talking in terms of takes, but different recordings months apart. I just kind of get an instinctive feeling that yes, this is it.

It's been said that you use the studio time in a clever way, and use it to get good at playing the songs, but from what I understand from the new record, a lot of it was just played on piano and guitar in a room that you set aside for music. Is that a big difference from the previous times when you used the studio to explore the songs and now you do it at the house?
I do more at home, yes.

Why?
I don't remember saying that quote, but the record where we explored the music all the time in the studio, especially, was *Fisherman's Blues*, and boy did we use it. We would record multiple arrangements of songs, and really took it to the limit on that one. Ever since, I've pulled back from the process. It takes a lot of money and a lot of energy working that way. So now I prefer to figure out the song before I even step into the studio. I think there's a better discipline working that way.

Is the process more satisfying that way?
Any process is satisfying if it gets the results, and if I repeated the *Fisherman's Blues* experience, I would have stopped getting results, so I had to do it differently.

Are there anxieties or issues about coming to America in the fall?
Well, we did a tour in the spring. Twelve cities, and that was great. I always love touring in America, because the audience hoots and yells *in all the right places.*

How would you identify an American audience as being different than an Irish or British audience?
They're less cynical, they're out for a good time. And they really know their music. I'm not saying that audiences in Europe don't, but there's something about an American audience that is especially sophisticated. And inhibited as well. It's that marvelous combination of inhibition and sophistication.

Ironically, a lot of American bands can't wait to go to Europe because the audiences are supposedly so literate, sophisticated, and interested.
Well maybe it's that old thing where the grass is always greener on the other man's side.

Why did it take over ten years to go back and re-imagine the Fisherman's Blues material that you've been working on?
There were so many other records to make in the meantime. You know, I kept writing songs, I kept finding myself in new cities and new countries.

It just didn't occur to you?
It was something in the back of my mind that I knew I would go back to when the time was right.

You once said, "The day that I stop being driven I should lay down and die, or go to Scotland and become a shepherd." Is it being driven that makes you write the songs, or is it the songs that drive you?
It's a piece of both. When I have written a cluster of new songs, a big drive comes into play, but at the same time I am a driven musician and performer. I don't know how not to do it. I am very grateful for it, that spirit.

Is it ever difficult to balance the spiritual and artistic sides of your personality?
I don't think of them as separate areas of life. When I went to live in the Findhorn Foundation community, which is a spiritual community in the north of Scotland, one of the first things I learned was I had to trust my intuition. I realized that I had been doing that in songwriting for decades without knowing that was its name.

Your mom taught English literature at a university...
Yep, still does.

You've done a musical backdrop for Yeat's "Stolen Child," but when you are writing, do you see any literature creeping in as you make a record, or as you make a song?
I don't think so, but I'm constantly reading books, and they are constantly inspiring me. One book that did inspire lyric writing was *Winter's Tale* by Mark Helprin, an American writer. That was an absolute motherfucker of a book. Definitely inspired me when I was writing the "Whole of the Moon," along with Jimi Hendrix.

Was it the picture the writer drew in the mind, or the rhythm of the language that inspired you?
His writing is jeweled, and there is a teeming quality to it. An abundance in his writing... And that inspired me.

And does it still inspire you?
I haven't read it for a number of years, but I am sure if I read it again I could get another few songs out of it actually.



Courtesy of Chrysalis Records

What makes you happy in your life?
Um, writing a good song, being happy with my wife. Travelling, being with people in different parts of the world. Working with my band. All those things. A good cup of coffee.

Do you still consider yourself the "mainstream guy who goes with the flow?"
I think I was trying to make a point when I said that, which I didn't articulate very well. I was trying to get across the point that society is distorted and has accepted that order as the natural order of things, but I try in my life to work in harmony with the natural order of things, and I don't always succeed, and I have my bad moments and my good moments. But I'm working on it constantly.

If you work towards that harmony in your work and your life, does that put you in touch with whoever you believe is the higher being?
Absolutely. I kind of feel that the universe has a mind, in fact I think the universe is a very loving, great being that we really can't perceive in our minds. But all the time it is sending us signs. The American Indians knew this. They knew how to read the universe, how to read the physical world for its symbolism and its construction, and I'm trying to do that in my daily life. Intuition is a great helper.

How do you know whether or not to trust intuition?
Well, I get a feeling inside, in my body, in my gut.

You just know?
Like when you meet a person and get a good feeling or bad feeling, it's that kind of thing.

Would this being relate to D.H. Lawrence's idea of the "roaring God-stuff" that makes up the universe and the shimmering electricity of life?
I have no idea. Never read D.H. Lawrence. But I kind of have a sense of what the Native American's call the great mystery. I subscribe to that.

Is this knowledge through books alone, or have you traveled to Indian reservations?
I had been to reservations, yeah, in Canada and Arizona, but mainly through reading.

What makes modern western culture a wasteland, or as you call it on the new record, the weary land?
Well, I have lived in the community and in western Ireland, which is to me the old world, the ancient world. And when I came back to live in London, after a break of twelve years, I could sense the violence and uneasiness in the air. And a focus on celebrity, drugs, glamour, and superficiality. It was like

looking at my country through a distorted lens.

But is that really any different than the last fifty years? What brought about this sudden recognition?
I think I had been away and saw it with new eyes. To some degree, my new eyes allowed me to see what was already there, things I hadn't seen clearly before, but I also think to some degree there was a difference. You know I noticed it mostly in the comedians. New things had become acceptable. Cruelty had come into the comedy, it had become more acceptable for comedians to use cruelty in their work. In the same way in the 1980s Margaret Thatcher made it acceptable to be selfish. Things that had previously been unspoken were now acceptable. I think in rock music in the early 1990s drugs became more acceptable, to the extent that Oasis had a big picture of cocaine jars on one of their albums. That hadn't been acceptable for a long time.

Did that go against your early punk sensibilities?
Well, punk music had its own drugs of choice too, usually speed. But it had never been flaunted quite as much.

Because it was associated with the 1960s and the drug and hippy culture of the day?
I don't know. I couldn't say.

You wrote for *Jungleland* in Edinburgh.
That was my fanzine.

You interviewed John Cale, Richard Hell, and Mick Jones. There's been heavy exposure in US magazines about punk's 25th anniversary and the death of Joey Ramone. Are people misrepresenting the punk era?
I haven't been aware of these articles.
I haven't noticed any of them here.

Your previous live shows have been described as a great musical umbrella, one mad session. Will the fall tour be similar?
We'll be playing a lot of the *Rock in a Weary Land*. It will be a rock show, but with a few acoustic elements strategically placed and a certain amount of improvisation.

How important is spontaneity or improvisation to the live show or the process of making a record?
It's not really very important in the live set. I love to improvise. I like to take a left turn during the performance of the songs. Recording wise, I can record many different ways. When we recorded *Fisherman's Blues* we were improvising all the time in the studio, but when I did a *Rock in the Weary Land* it was much more focused and disciplined.

This album feels very gospel-like to me. Do you feel that way?
Yes. I listened to a lot of gospel music before I made it, and I feel at least one of its legs is rooted in gospel. I've loved gospel music for a long time, and when I lived in New York I used to go to gospel concerts.

i think i had been away and saw it with new eyes. to some degree, my new eyes allowed me to see what was already there, things i hadn't seen clearly before, but i also think to some degree there was a difference

Did you go out to the churches in Brooklyn?
Up in Harlem. I used to see the acappela gospel groups, no name gospel groups that I'm sure are still around.

Did it revitalize music for you?
Well, gospel is a great store house of not only songs, but imagery that rings a chord with people, because most of us have grown up in a nominally Christian background, so we know this language that is in gospel music, and it speaks to us on an emotional and soul level. I don't think that Christians have got a monopoly on it.

But there's also the intense use of parallelism- repeated rhythmical phrasing.
Absolutely, that is fantastic.

You've said that videos are bad for music, but I know you have also made some. Do you still feel that way, or do you think that you can make videos with integrity and a kind of soul?
Well, that's a good question. I think a few people can make videos with integrity.

Like who?
Peter Gabriel, and Kate Bush.

And how do you go about making a video that has integrity?
I don't take well to video. I write songs to create images in a person's mind, and video gets in the way of that for me. It undoes what I do. It's a medium that I don't recognize. Do you know what I'm saying? I don't respect it as a medium. And I don't have any hunger to do it. I went for seven years without making a video, from the *This is the Sea* in 1985 to *Dream Harder* in 1993. For eight years, in fact, I didn't make a single video. And when I signed to Geffen records for *Dream Harder* in 1992, I remember the conversation with David Geffen when I said, I don't want to have to make videos. I'll do them if I want to try it, and he said, okay, we want you to be comfortable, and he was cool about it. And I did try, I made two videos when I was on Geffen, and neither of them was a success creatively for me. One of them got pulled. I tried it again with *Bring 'Em All In*, and made one or two, and then tried it again with *Still Burning*, and made another two videos, but it just doesn't work for me. I'm not quite sure what I'm doing wrong. I think it's because I don't see videos as a valid extension of my music, so it's not going to work for me. It's just tough luck.

There's something very fake and business-like about videos, whereas the Waterboys always had a very street level feel; for instance, you were still busking in the mid-1980s and doing surprise gigs. That essence is totally lost in the video format.
Yeah, I am aware that in the 1960s there were artists who weren't necessarily good-looking, but had voices, and became big stars because of their records, like Joe Cocker, or Eric Burdon and the Animals. They would find it very hard in a video culture, where the way we look is so important. And I think that's a downside to video. I don't think that music needs video. I've bought myself a little video camera, and we're filming everything we do as we tour around the world with the band, and I can see a Waterboys "on the road" video.

That seems like a different process, more honest and documentary.
Well, it's creative for me. And I'm not saying that all the people who make videos are dishonest about it, but it just doesn't work for me. I may try it again in the future.

If seventy percent of live shows happen simply because of pleasure, then what's the other thirty percent of why you play live shows?
I want to support the record, and I want the band to be seen and heard.

For the first four records, you were the producer, and for the next four you were the co-producer, but now you are producing again...
I was burned out after *Fisherman's Blues*.

But are you happy to be back in control?
Oh my god, yes, it's fantastic. After *Fisherman's Blues*, I didn't want that responsi-

bility of production for a long time, so I tried co-producing, and that was okay. I like the records I made during that period. But I really think I make my best records when I'm producing like now. I think they have a greater degree of Waterboy-ness, whatever that means.

Some people say that the Golder's Green Hippodrome show in 1985 was the Waterboys at their best live.
Well, that was a radio session. We did four songs only for a BBC radio show.

Was it a peak for you, or just another link in the chain?
Yeah, just another link in the chain for me. We did a version of "Don't Bang the Drum" that day that is on the *Secret Life of the Waterboys* record that was definitely wonderful.

But it was done without drums.
It was with piano, trumpet, fiddle, and saxophone.

And the trumpet player had only played spontaneously in the studio, never live?
Something like that. No, I think he had played it live, but we had always played it with drums like it is on the *This is The Sea* record, but on this day I wanted to do a totally different version. So I played it on the piano, and got the three boys, the fiddle, sax, and trumpet, to improvise as I played the song on piano. And to inspire them, I got the trumpet and sax players to play up high in the royal boxes, because the Hippodrome is a converted theater, while I was down on the floor playing piano. They were way up, suspended off the ground, and then we turned all the lights off, and then we recorded it.

With the lights off?
Yeah, and everybody was inspired, and I think we made this magical piece of music.

Bob Dylan told you he loved the song "Whole of the Moon?"
Well, I don't know how much he liked it, but when I met him, yeah, he told me he enjoyed it.

You jammed with him a little bit?
In his studio.

Is there any new Dylan material that stands out to you?
Well, I enjoyed *Time Out of Mind*. I loved the production on that. I thought it was a great record. I get so lost in the lyrics. The lyrics are so bleak, yet the sound of the music around him is so beautiful, it's like he's surrounded by angels that you can't see. A beautiful record.

Has there always been a streak of independence in you, regardless of what ensemble you put together for the Waterboys?
In the Waterboys I've always been responsible for the direction of the band. And it wasn't until I met Steve Wickham that it became more of a band. Even on *This is the Sea*, which looks like a band record, I'm directing the whole thing. The guys are coming down to the studio to play, and I'm using them as I envisage it. It wasn't until we made *Fisherman's Blues* that we played live in the studio as a band, and people were inventing their own part. On the early records, I'm directing everything. And it is only when I work with a musician like Steve and develop a great intuitive musical bond that I can let go of the music.

Do you feel that your music is redemptive, not just for you, but for listeners too?
I would hope that my music, and the Waterboys' music, contributes to the good. My intentions have always been to inspire. When I make a record, I want to inspire people, I want people to be inspired like I am when I hear a record.

What music are you listening to right now that puts shivers up your spine?
Well, someone has given me a copy of the new Spiritualized, and the third track just does something, it is so great, it's really turning me on.

Can you put your finger on what it is?
No. It's an absolutely brilliant track, absolutely brilliant, inspired track. I've been listening to a lot of Miles Davis and Ella Fitzgerald.

What era of Davis?
Sketches of Spain, *Porgy and Bess*, *Miles Ahead*, the Gil Evans record.

Is there still something unique or special about your relationship to Ireland?
Yes, very much so. It's still very strong.

Even after you've lived in New York?
Yes, part of my soul is in Ireland.

And will that continue to filter into the music?
Yeah, it's somewhere under the consciousness of the music, it's not in the forefront like it was on *Fisherman's Blues*, but it's always there.

What are you not looking forward to when you come back to America?
Well, the only thing that I don't like when I tour is when I have to get up very early in the morning.

What about the long distance?
I don't mind that. I love travelling, I just hate getting up early in the morning and then having to function throughout the day on two or three hours of sleep. I'm old enough that I'm at that stage where I don't get spare parts anymore (*laughs*).

Is America just as weary and grotesque as Europe?
Well, wherever I go in America, I find there is this sense of clarity and optimism. America is built on different foundations than the European countries. For me, coming from the Old World, I find my experiences in America as very fresh ones. People are really friendly in restaurants, it's things like that.

Why do you think people are friendly?
They are brought up that way. It's an American thing.

Is the lag time between your releases in Europe and America troubling at all?
Well, it's not ideal, but I think with the next new record it will catch up.



...i try in my life to work in harmony with the natural order of things; and i don't always exceed, and i have my bad moments and my good moments: but i'm working on it constantly.

Citizen Fish

An interview with Dick, leader of the Citizen Fish —by Balázs Sarkadi



Courtesy of Honest Don's Records

You're one of the very few well-known contemporary punk bands that come from the UK. What can be the reason for the decline of punk in the UK? Do you see any changes in the popularity of punk in the UK, and are there any regional differences? (I mean the punk situation in Scotland vs. England vs. Ireland…)

I guess we're only well-known cos we been going for 11 years, but this doesn't mean there's a decline in the scene, there's a load of bands around—over 100 played at the Holidays in the Sun festival recently! Punk is getting more popular with the recent influx of American punk influencing a lot of young bands' music. The only difference between the regions is the accent!

What's the main difference between being on Honest Don's and releasing your stuff on your own Bluurg Records?

The distribution for Bluurg was pretty hopeless in Europe (Citizen Fish were selling next to nothing there), but Honest Don's has excellent promotion and distribution everywhere, and that's a big difference, achieved, I should add, without needing a major label to do it!

Did Chumbawamba's signing to a major label hurt the credit of anarchist bands in general? Their claim was that they had to do it to have a real impact on people. Do you feel attracted at all by the possibility of reaching millions of people with your music by compromises like softening the sound and the words?

A serious anarchist/socially aware message loses all its meaning if it goes through large corporate business. It seems insane to think you can destroy corporate power by 'using' it to sell your message. It hurt a lot of people when Chumbas went on EMI, 'cos it contradicted everything they stood for (including their involvement in a compilation LP called *Fuck EMI* in 1988)!

Citizen Fish evolved from Culture Shock, which evolved from the Subhumans, which sounds like a natural course of development to me. What made you reform the Subhumans? And how do the two bands relate to each other now? Are the Subhumans regarded as a sideproject of Citizen Fish now, or are they equally important?

As people keep buying Subhumans CDs, we thought it would be a good idea to play some gigs, cos most people had never seen us live… so we had a practice and it was so much revisited energy and fun to play the old songs, that we knew it would be a good idea! Both bands are important (and fun to do!), but Citizen Fish takes priority, if only cos it's what 3 of us do all the time, whereas Bruce (Subhumans' guitarist) has a music shop and family to look after most of the year…

Dick, why only one set of clothes for a whole tour? Does this gesture carry a political message? I know I may sound like a wimp now, but doesn't it feel terrible to put on the same clothes you sweat through the night before, even for a punk?

Oops! This is all a joke! It's Craig's sense of humour (he wrote that band info bit on the website)… one set of clothes would be gross! I take at least 4 shirts and 4000000000 socks on tour!

I've read you have the most devoted fanbase in the West Coast of the USA. Have you ever thought of moving there, like the Mekons did?

No, there's too many roots here that are good to get back to.

Being interested in politics, especially the history of the left (I guess), have you followed what was happening in Eastern Europe in the past decade? Have you ever been to Hungary, and what do you know about our country?

We did two gigs with Trottel in Hungary in 91. The post-'89 'opening up' of Eastern Europe meant easier access (both in terms of travel and knowledge), but unfortunately also meant the introduction of western commercialism of the shittiest kind (McDonald's, etc); western imperialism, dressed up as good economics and 'luxury' products. After so much exterior control from the East, one can only hope that control under a different image will be rejected just as strongly.

What do you think of Jello Biafra's recent campaigning for the Green Party? Should punk artists get involved in party politics? And by the way, do you have any all-time favorite political punk lyrics writer? Do you like the lyrics of Biafra, Greg Graffin of Bad Religion, or the Crass, maybe Chumbawamba?

Jello Biafra is the only punk who could be a politician, as his memory for facts is incredible and his ideas for change are far removed from normal political idealism. Good luck to him! Crass' lyrics were a large influence on me, as they dealt with a 'system' that existed in reality, not just in slogans. Their lyrics were a learning experience, and a confirmation that someone was taking rebellion and change seriously. Outside of overtly political lyrics, I love TV Smith's lyrics (he sang for The Adverts).

How can you afford to have three roadies? Do they all go with you on every tour or are they doing shifts? And do you make the female roadies carry the cabinets and all that heavy stuff?

There have been tours with all three, at the moment it's Richard and Karoline in the USA and er… no-one in the UK! We just pay them and ourselves enough to eat with, and if we make anything at the end of the tour we split it equally.

Why is your drummer called Trotsky and did you ever threaten him with hitting him with an icepick for being out of time?

I asked Trotsky this and he says 'cos my name's not Dave', which is a bit zen, but true. It's an old school nickname that stuck.

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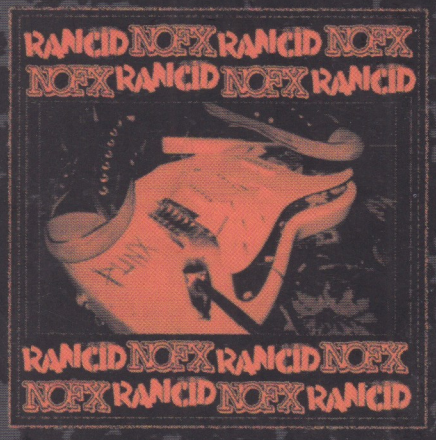
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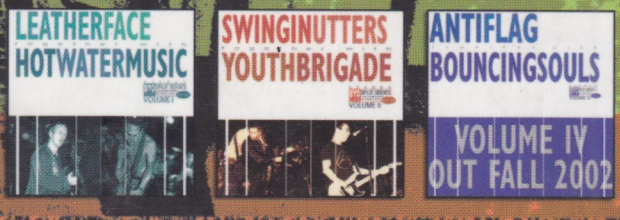
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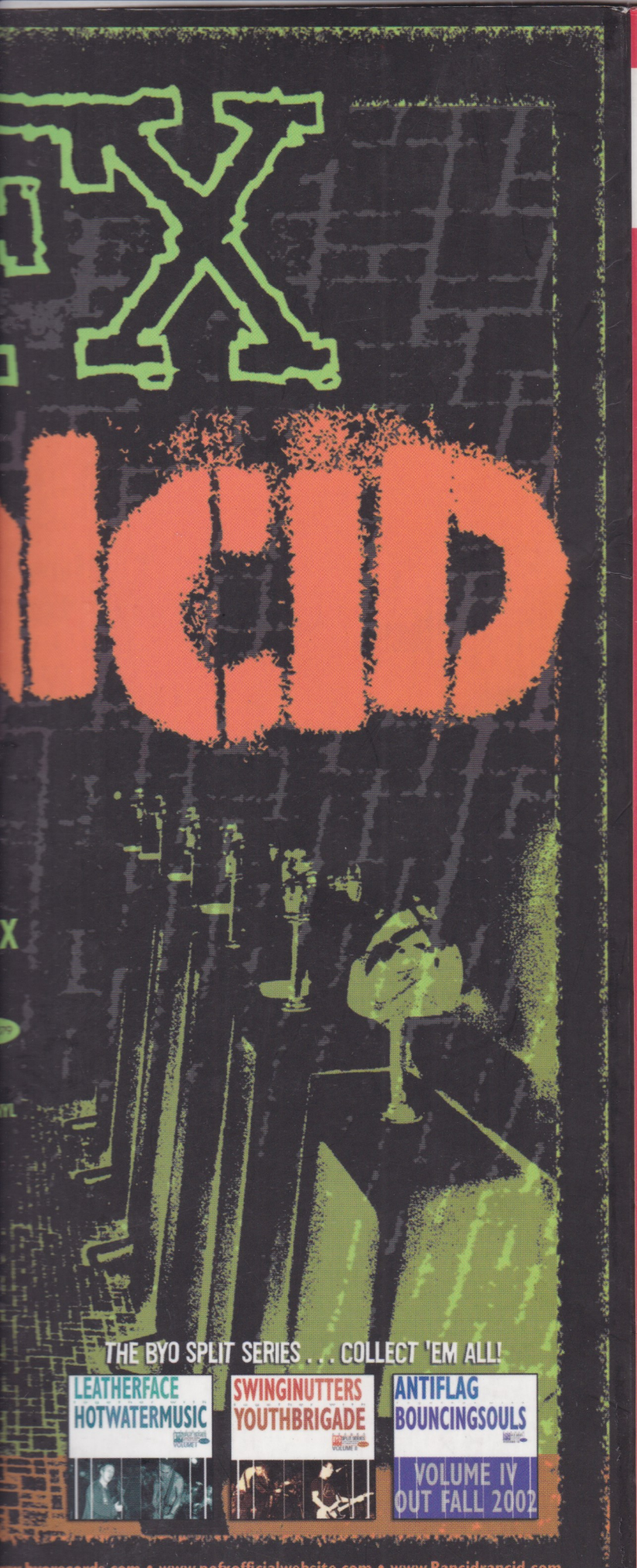
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